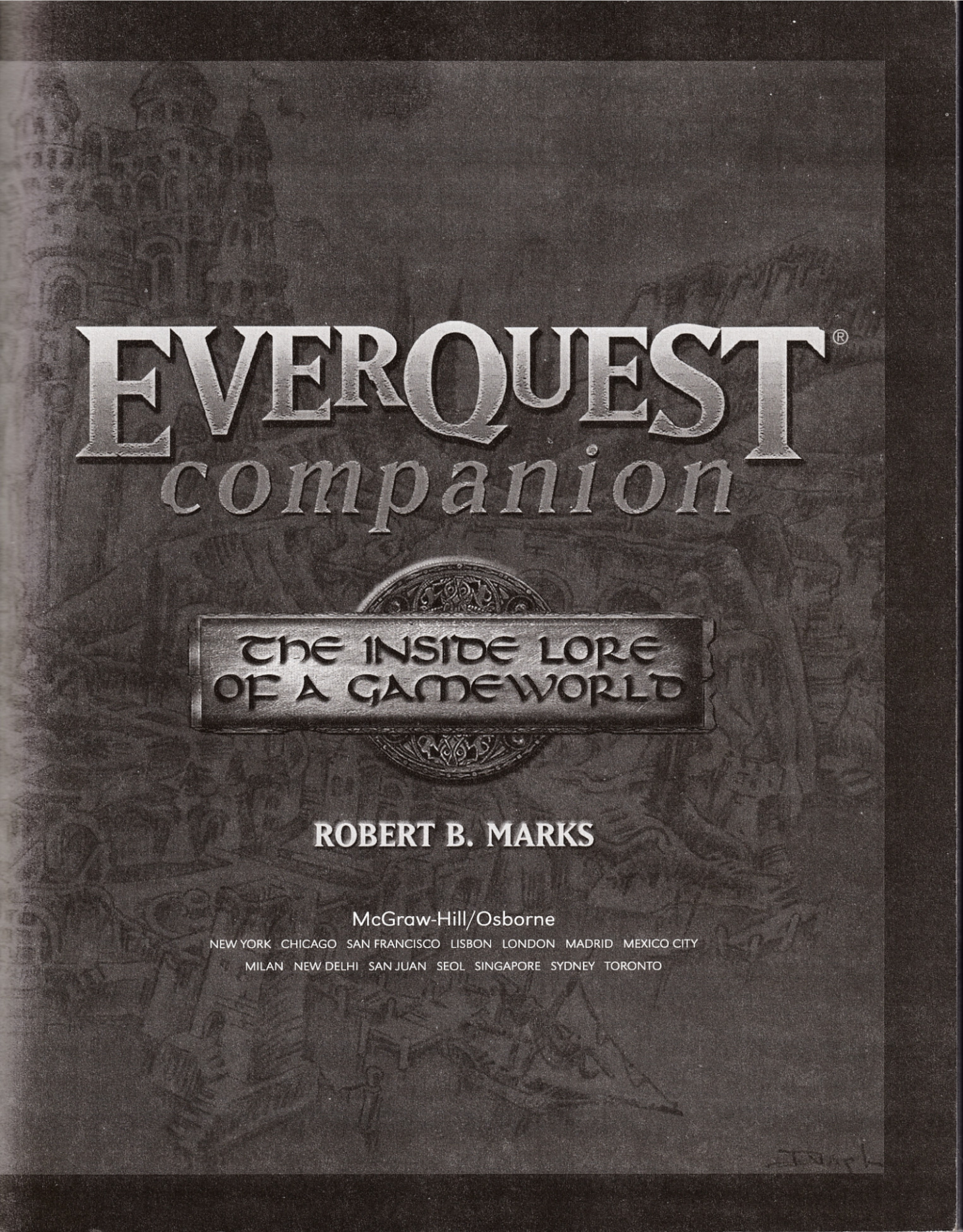
EVERQUEST companion

THE INSIDE LORE OF A GAMEWORLD

ROBERT B. MARKS



ROBERT B. MARKS

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EverQuest® Companion:
The Inside Lore of a Gameworld

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1234567890 QPD QPD 019876543

ISBN 0-07-222903-9

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Acquisitions Editor	Timothy Green
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Dedication

To the old gang, the Earth-Scorchers...Franklyn Dawson, John Evans, Brian Dorner, and Jason Ng

To Gord Brown, who I met in a *Diablo* game

To the new gang, Malcolm Cox and the Digital Gamer regulars both past and present...Shawn Keown, Marc Elliot, Kevin Spice, Shane Magee, Russ, Spencer, and quite a few more

To Ed Greenwood, for his constant support

And, last but most certainly not least, to Harlan Ellison, whose *An Edge In My Voice* column inspired me to greater things

This book is for you.

About the Author

Robert B. Marks is a writer and editor living in Kingston, Ontario. He was first published professionally by *Computer Gaming World*, where he reviewed *Myth II: Soulblighter*. He followed this up with the best-selling e-book *Diablo: Demonsbane*, which inaugurated the Blizzard fiction line, and a computer games issues column titled *Garwulf's Corner* on Diabloii.net—one of the first of its kind. Never one to be limited in his projects, he also designs production swords for Last Legend (www.lastlegend.com), where he's assisted with the Last Legend Ranger sword and has started a sword line of his own based on *Beowulf*.

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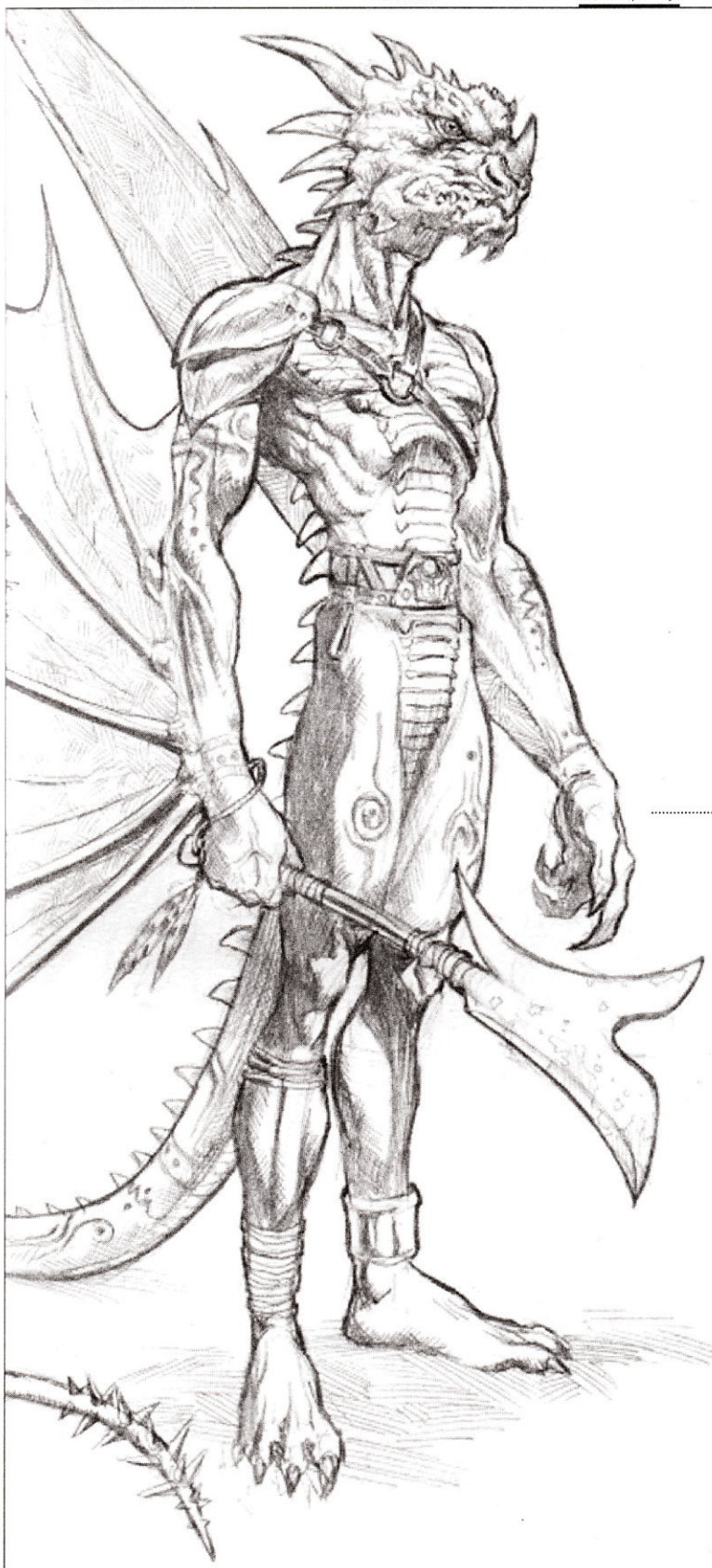

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FOREWORD

I can't believe it's been 4½ years since *EverQuest* was launched. We now have over 450,000 *EverQuest* subscribers worldwide, and this amazing game is up and running in the U.S., Japan, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, France, Germany, England and many other places around the world. It's truly a worldwide phenomenon that has touched a lot of people's lives in some really dramatic ways.

I've had the pleasure of meeting many of the Citizens of Norrath at the Fan Faires we've held all around the country. Some of my most memorable experiences include meeting a family of six who plays *EverQuest* together all the time. I've also known people who married after having met inside the game. *EverQuest* has impacted people in ways we never dreamed it would.

I can remember the day it all started as clearly as if it were yesterday. I was still working at 989 Studios at the time, and I had just gotten the green light to go forward with an online RPG. I had been playing the heck out of a game called *CyberStrike*™ at the time and had run up some pretty large online bills on Genie (I remember the look on my wife's face when the first $600 bill came to our house

a month after we got married) because at that time you still paid for online gaming by the hour. After checking around on the net, I found Brad McQuaid and Steve Clover who had just made a great shareware game called *WarWizard 2*. Through them, I found Bill Trost who became the Lead Designer of EQ. Anyone who had the dedication to make a game like *WarWizard 2* was bound to have the right kind of mentality to build something from scratch on a very tight budget.

And almost exactly three years later EQ launched...

I want to thank the *EverQuest* team both past and present for their incredibly hard work and dedication to keeping this world alive and exciting. I've had the good fortune of working with a very talented group of people who keep the oil lamp in the tower burning until the wee hours of the morning. They live and breathe this game, and we are the luckier for it.

I'd also like to thank the millions of people who have played *EverQuest*. Thank you for letting us work for you. Because at the end of the day, that's exactly what we do.

—John Smedley, San Diego, 2003
President, Sony Online Entertainment

Acknowledgments

No book is written in a vacuum, and this particular endeavor would not have been possible without the help of numerous individuals. So, in alphabetical order, special thanks goes to: Kelly Anderson, Mindi Basi, John Blakely, Cindy Bowens, Steve Botkin, Amy Bradley, Jeff Butler, Laura C., Todd Carson, Michele Casto, Malcolm Cox, Harlan Ellison, Roy Froma, Julian Goldblatt, Peter Grame, Timothy Green, Dr. David Greenfield, Ed Greenwood, Jeremy Harvey, Joel Herndon, Robert Hill, Rod Humble, Sean Kauppinen, Chris Kramer, Eric Kwan, Greg Lassard, Richard Lawson, Shawn Lord, Brad McQuaid, Jeff Moyer, Jessica Mulligan, LeeAnn Pickrell, Avonelle Rand, Tamara Sanderson, John Sisk, Andy Sites, John Smedley, Oliver Smith, Roger Stewart, Marty Stratton, Bill Trost, Roger Uzun, Rich Waterson, the Wayfarer Guardians (Chris Closs, Grant Jackson, Justin Machesney, Andy Meilleur, James Row, and Mike Wibberley), Steve Wieck, Stewart Wieck, Elizabeth Woolley, Matt Yaney, and everyone else who contributed in even the smallest of ways.

INTRODUCTION

Most authors write their introductions once the book is written. I'm a bit odd in that regard; most of the time I write the introduction first, probably because it puts me in the right frame of mind to compose the rest of the book.

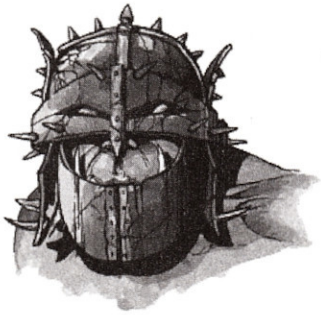
I'm a bit odd in other ways, too. For one thing, I take computer games seriously. Very seriously, in fact. For two years I ran a column titled *Garwulf's Corner* on Diabloii.net dealing with issues ranging from free speech to computer game addiction.

It tends to make people wonder. Almost every three months while I was writing my column, somebody would ask me why I take computer games so seriously. There are a number of glib answers that I could give, but I never have. It's a good question, and one that I can answer in full now.

It's a bit of a long story, so sit down and relax. I promise I won't be boring.

A lot of it has to do with what things were like when I was growing up. I grew up in a middle-class family who as of yet was untouched by the recession that would strike in the early 1990s. When I was first exposed to what we would now recognize as a computer game, it was something incredible and exotic. Computers at that time were primitive affairs; four-color graphics were amazing and new, and a 10MB hard disk was an incredible luxury.

Actually, I should backtrack a bit. My father has been in the computer business for more than a decade longer than I've been alive. My mother, a teacher and writer by trade, had been working on a PDP 11-23: a computer that



filled an entire closet, had eight-inch floppy disks, and portable hard drives that bore a remarkable resemblance to very large World War II land mines. I guess the first time I was exposed to a video game was in 1978 or 1979, when I was perhaps three or four years old. Somebody had put this little thing on the computer with ASCII characters shooting at one another.

I was not terribly impressed. But then again, it wasn't anything impressive.

Flash forward to around 1984. I'm in public school, and my best friend at the time, Kiran Sachdev, had invited me over to his place for a birthday party. I don't remember what I gave him, but what I saw there was burned into my memory.

King's Quest.

By today's standards, it was primitive, with four-color graphics that took almost a minute to draw on the screen (I'm told the game had 16-color graphics from the get-go, but Kiran didn't have a 16-color monitor). Kiran also didn't have a hard drive on his computer, so he had the entire thing on floppy disk. Still, it was amazing. Awe-inspiring, in fact. I don't think I was old enough to understand the potential of the game I had just seen, but it certainly made an impression.

Now, a bit of an aside. Those who were old enough then will remember that this was the time of the console wars. Forget the spat between Sega and Nintendo in the early 1990s, or the current competition between Sony, Sega, Microsoft, and Nintendo; this was almost epic. This was the day when arcade game makers were coming out with console boxes, and

fighting tooth-and-nail over the market. My memory was of a dozen various types of consoles out there; my family had a ColecoVision (which was still working two years ago when my father traded it to a friend's daughter for a promised never-ending supply of home-baked cookies). Only two of the competitors survived, and we all know who they were.

My father had bought us the ColecoVision around 1980. I was quite familiar with arcade games at the time. Shooting alien spaceships in *Gorf*, bombing an alien city in *Cosmic Avenger*, I knew these like the back of my hand. But the computer game was something completely different. *King's Quest* was freeform; you could do almost anything you wanted. The moment I saw it, I recognized the difference. It was something far, far greater than any console game of the time could have been.

Now, in the present day, the console games are catching up. But, believe me, for the longest time they were quite primitive compared to the computer games out there.

My father bought the family what was then considered a decent computer. It was a Texas Instruments TI-99/4A. For all intents and purposes, it was a console gaming platform with a keyboard. You hooked it up to your television set, and you could play games on it, program in BASIC, and even do some word processing, if you bought the program cartridge and put some extra money into a hard disk peripheral. It didn't survive the market (it came out around the same time that Apple started putting out computers, and Apple won),

but the games on it tended to have just a bit more to them than the console games of the time. Among other things, the TI-99 could run text-only adventures.

On my thirteenth birthday, my parents gave me a computer. It was a clone of an IBM XT, with a whole 8 MHz of processing power. It had a monochrome monitor, and a 30MB hard drive, which at the time was considered quite large.

Naturally, I filled the thing with games.

Now, I'm not a saint. Within a couple of years, the recession had hit, making many families (my own included) realize the hard way that the drop to lower middle class could be abrupt indeed, and I had just entered a high school community where none of us could afford to buy computer games. My computer, which after a couple of years had been upgraded to a speedy 12 MHz 80286, became part of a trading network. One person would have the original disks for a game here, another person would have a different game there, and so we swapped around, made copies, and got to play as many games as humanly possible.

Yes, I know it sounds horrible, but things really were different then. We were all struggling, summer jobs were scarce, and within a couple of years, we all grew out of it anyway. In retrospect, it wasn't right, but none of us were old enough to make the connection between swapping games and piracy—to us, they were just really cool things we could play on our computers.

Regardless, with each new game I played, I became more fascinated.

My little brother got his hands on Sid Meier's *Civilization*, and I had my introduction to fantasy role-playing with the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Gold Box* games from SSI (this was actually when I had grown out of swapping, and was buying the games as they came onto the discount rack). They became a part of my life. In fact, throughout high school, about the only punishment my father could hand out to me when I misbehaved that would have any actual impact was taking away my computer game privileges, and even then I found ways around it.

I'm not sure when I became aware of the storytelling power of the computer game. To a degree, I think the seed of awareness sprouted when I first laid my eyes on those amazing four-color graphics of *King's Quest*. It blossomed as I grew up, so that by the time *Computer Gaming World* asked me to write a review of *Myth II*, I was well aware that computer games were something special, going so far as to call them part of the "new mythology," in the same category as James Bond. I also became convinced that the computer game was the most powerful storytelling format I had ever seen—the audience could be a participant, rather than a mere observer.

Why do I take computer games seriously? Having grown up at the same time as the genre itself, it comes naturally to me.

And, as can happen in a genre where the technology moves so quickly that the new can become obsolete within six months, everything changed around 1997, when a game titled

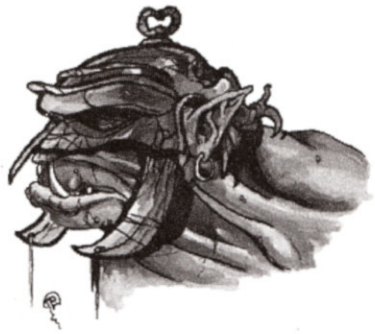
Ultima Online was released by Origin and Electronic Arts.

Unlike anything I'd ever seen before it, *Ultima Online* was quite literally a virtual world (this sort of thing had been around since the 1970s, but I didn't know that at the time). A player could enter it, take up a trade, and quite literally do anything he or she liked. In the here and now, with so many persistent worlds that you can't take a step without tripping over a Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game, it's easy to misunderstand the scope of what Origin managed to pull off. To illustrate, let's try something. Get up, and go to your living room (assuming you're not already there).

Now, take a look around. If your living room is anything like mine, you'll have a couch, perhaps an armchair, some paintings or posters on the wall, and a coffee table. There may also be a television set, DVD player, VCR, cable or satellite box, and a telephone.

All of the electronics were made by companies, and there are a variety of different brands to choose from, each with a different quality of product. The paintings or posters were made by somebody else, possibly as a labor of love, or maybe just to put food on the table. The couch could have been bought in a variety of different places.

Now look out the window. Do you see trees, a freshly mown lawn, or maybe kids playing? Perhaps there's a general store, or a supermarket within sight. Somebody actually owns and manages those, staying overtime to keep the books balanced



and order new inventory.

It's an intricate world, isn't it? And looking around a living room or out a window gives you the barest tip of the iceberg. In real life, everything is connected to everything else in some way. Now, imagine what has to be done to simulate something like it, and in such a way that people can play in it without needing a supercomputer.

Whether most people recognize it or not, the computer game is on the cusp of a revolution. New persistent worlds have been created, perhaps the most notable being *EverQuest*. In fact, *EverQuest* has become so successful that it has spawned conventions with thousands of attendees and controversy to a level that hasn't been seen since the backlash against *Dungeons & Dragons* in the late 1980s. Go into the game itself, and you find a group of real people playing in a virtual world, with stories, ideals, experiences, and even language that have come directly from the game world.

It is more than just a game. It is a culture in and of itself. What it is now, and how it became possible, is worthy of exploration, don't you agree?

Let's take a closer look.

—Robert B. Marks
Kingston, Ontario
August 2003

WHAT IS EVERQUEST?

CHAPTER 1

THEN IT REGISTERED. HE WAS A PLAYER IN A GAME! A COMPUTER GAME. HE HAD FINALLY GOTTEN THE EQUIPMENT TO ENTER THE MOST SOPHISTICATED CLASS OF GAMES, THE ONES THAT PUT THE WHOLE PERSON IN, IN EFFECT. THE HELMET, THE GLOVES, THE SPECIAL CONNECTIONS—IT HAD HAPPENED SO SUDDENLY AND COMPLETELY AND COMPELLINGLY THAT FOR THE MOMENT HE HAD FORGOTTEN THE REALITY AND JUST LIVED THE SCENE.

—*PIERS ANTHONY,* KILLOBYTE

This is a chapter for beginners—for all those people who have heard about *EverQuest* and seen the game in the local software store but don't really know what it, or an MMORPG, is. Everybody who has played *EverQuest* can probably skip this chapter. If you move on to Chapter 2, you'll find a bunch of interesting facts about the history of fantasy, computer games, and persistent worlds.

For those who are still reading, let's continue with the basic question: What is *EverQuest*?

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BASICS

EverQuest is what is known as a *Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game* (MMORPG), or a *persistent world*. Unlike most other types of games, *EverQuest* leads you into a world where most of the other characters you meet are played by human beings. Thousands of players can wander around the world of

EverQuest at the same time, and they can all interact with one another.

A player will encounter three types of characters in *EverQuest*. The most common are known as *player characters*, which are created and operated by other human beings. You can tell whether a character is a player character by the color of the name over its head. Player character names tend to appear in dark blue or purple lettering, the latter used when the player is in a special role-playing mode.

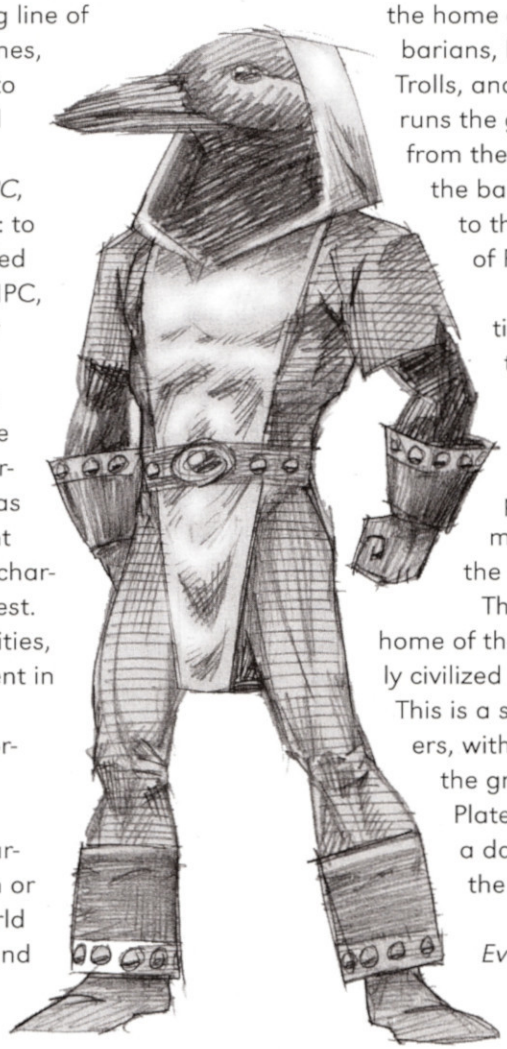
The second most common characters are the monsters, or "mobs," a Multi-User Dungeon term that refers to single creatures—yes, it is odd, but games like *EverQuest* come from a long line of multiplayer role-playing games, and their legacy does tend to have the occasional oddball facet. These are a form of *non-player character*, or *NPC*, that exists for two purposes: to attack players and to be killed by players. These, like any NPC, have a light blue name over their heads.

The third type is straight non-player characters. These characters have some importance to the players, either as merchants to buy equipment from or sell goods to, or as characters that are part of a quest. They appear mainly in the cities, although some will be present in the wilderness.

Role-playing is very important, as is participating in the overall community. In *EverQuest*, you create a character and pretend to be him or her. You can explore the world around you, make friends, and even join organizations of other players known as *guilds* while you set out on quests that will bring you fame, power, and glory. Characters can be of a number of different races, professions, or character *classes*, each with its own unique attributes.

EverQuest is set in a fantasy realm known as Norrath, a gigantic, living world filled with magic, towns, and monsters. If you liked *The Lord of the Rings*, you'd probably feel right at home in Norrath.

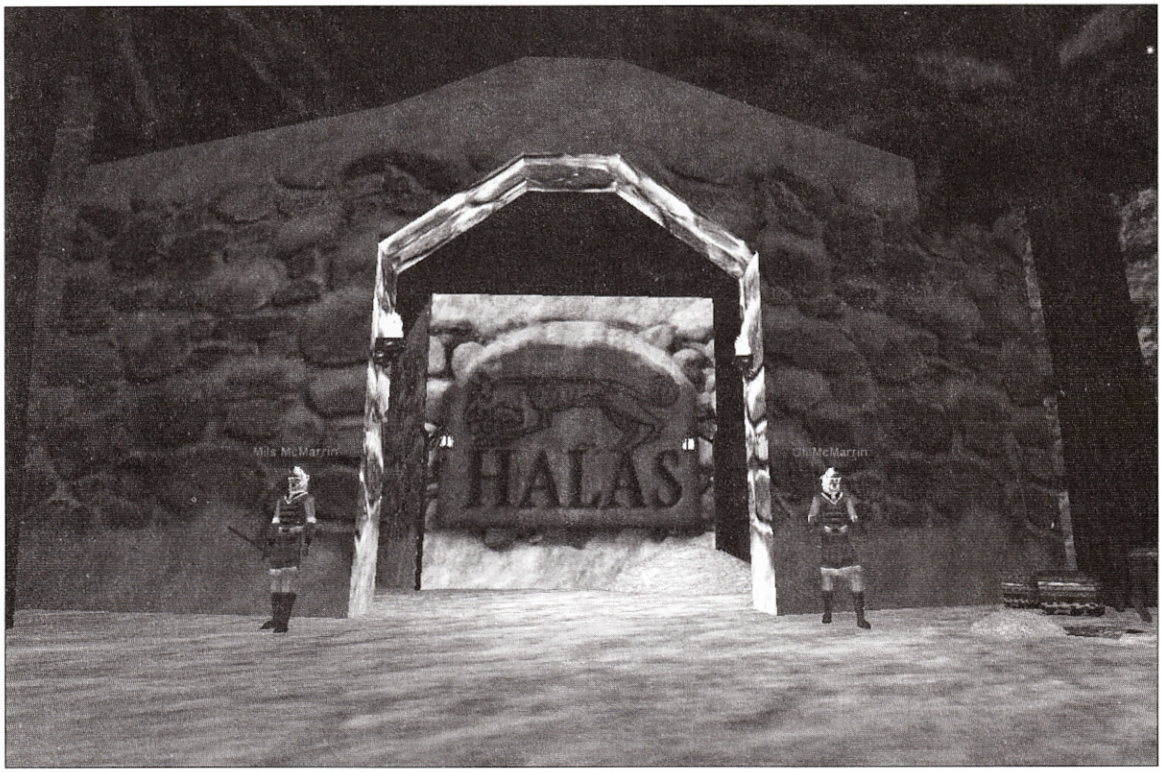
Although it originally started with three continents, Norrath now has five, along with a moon and several planes of existence, all of which can be explored. The main continent is Antonica, a large landmass that is the home of the Humans, Barbarians, Halfings, Dark Elves, Trolls, and Ogres. Antonica runs the gambit of environments, from the snowy mountains near the barbarian city of Halas to the vast deserts south of Freeport.



The second original continent is Faydwer, home of the Elves, Gnomes, and Dwarves. This is a realm of vast forests to the north, with rolling plains to the south, and a mountainous wasteland to the southeast.

The third continent is Odus, home of the Erudites, a race of highly civilized black-skinned humanoids. This is a smaller land than the others, with the Erudites living on the grasslands of the Grand Plateau in the north, while a dark wasteland lies in the south.

The five expansions to *EverQuest* saw the introduction of new lands for



Part of the Barbarian city of Halas

The city of Firiona Vie from the *Ruins of Kunark*

players to explore, along with one or two new races. The first expansion was *The Ruins of Kunark*. Kunark is the home of the Iskar, a tribal society of lizard-like creatures who once held an empire.

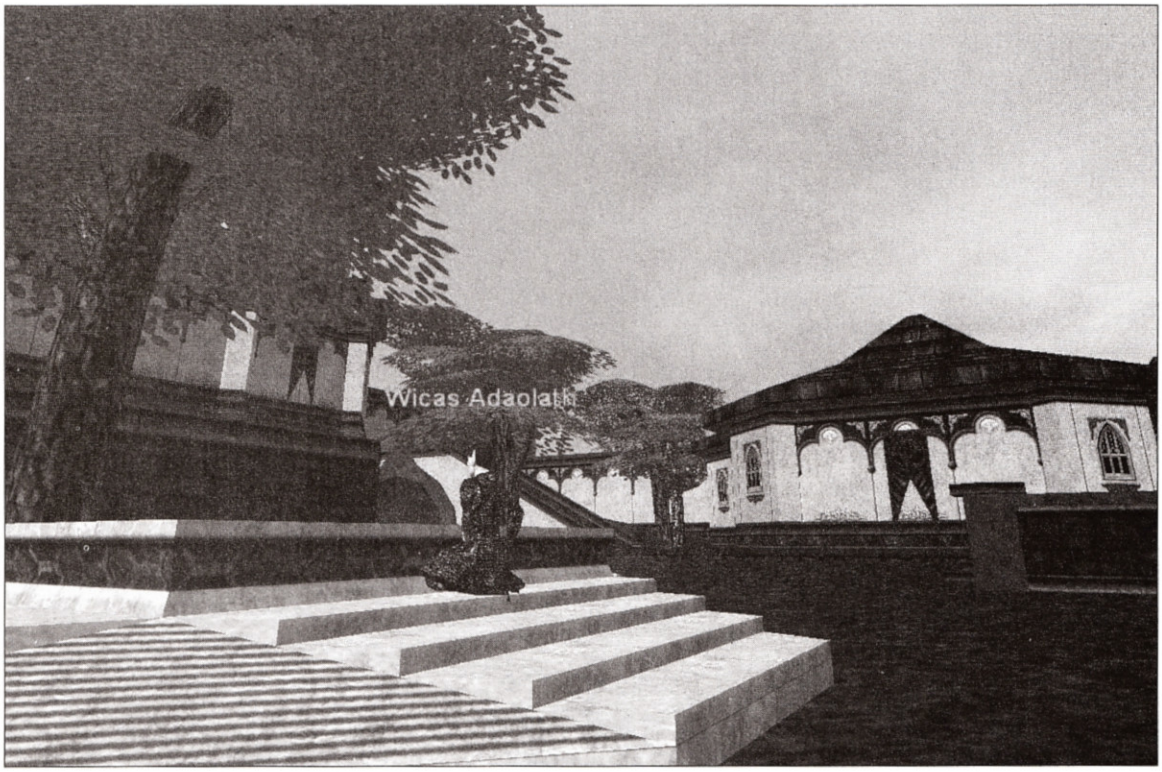
With *The Scars of Velious*, Sony introduced a new continent, frozen beneath ice and snow. No new player races are included, but numerous new monsters appear ready to fight, and a couple of cities are included to explore.

The Shadows of Luclin took the *EverQuest* realm into outer space, allowing players to wander around Norrath's moon. Unlike our moon, Luclin is vibrant with life. The expansion offers a new player race, the Vah Shir, a race of cat-people resembling jungle beasts.

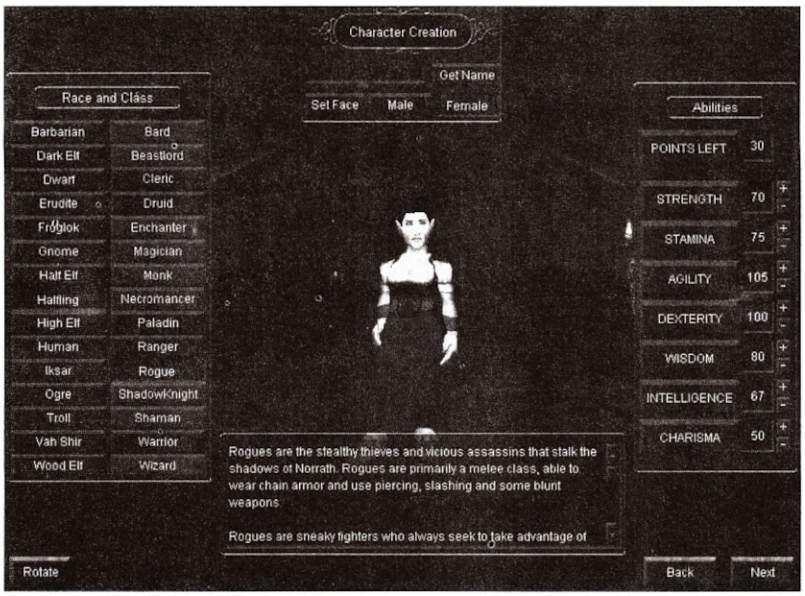
The fourth expansion is titled *The Planes of Power*. It allows players to exit the plane where Norrath exists and explore other worlds. Each major city is given a portal to the Plane of Knowledge; from there the characters can travel wherever they wish. Both major and minor planes are included in this expansion, each with a theme based on the deity governing it.

The fifth expansion is *The Legacy of Ykesha*, which presents a brand-new player race, the Froglok, and deals with the darker races' hunt for an artifact known as the Grozmok Stone.

The character classes are based on the race the player selects. For example, a human



The Plane of Knowledge from *The Planes of Power*



EverQuest's character creation screen—creating a female halfling rogue

character can't be a Beast Lord, while a Vah Shir can. Most of these classes would be very familiar to anybody who has been exposed to *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons.* The Paladin or Ranger classes are much the standard role-playing classes found in other games. Most of these classes are variations on a theme—either warriors, clerics, wizards, or rogues. Each of these classes has some special attribute—for example, the Ranger has the ability to track monsters and hide, while the Paladin has a healing skill called *laying hands.*

The warrior classes run the gambit from good to evil. On the pure and noble side, you have Paladins and Rangers. A basic warrior class can belong to any alignment, and the Shadow Knights are essentially the opposite of the Paladin.

The cleric classes can also run the gambit, but whether they are good or evil depends more on their race than their class. This class has Clerics, Druids, Monks, Shamans, and Beast Lords. All of these characters' traits are easy to imagine, except for the Monks and Beast Lords, both of which seem to be based on the Buddhist monks who invented Kung Fu. Most of the wizard classes' morality is based on character class, just like the warriors. Here, the differences between the classes is a bit more subtle. Enchanters use their magic to charm and enhance what is already present, while the Magician is essentially a summoner—they make creatures appear out of mid-air. The Wizard is the all-purpose mage, with the lion's share of offensive magic. The Necromancer, the master of the dark arts, specializes in raising the dead.

The rogue classes contain the last two character classes, grouped together for convenience more than similarity. They're the character classes that don't quite fit into any other category but can sit on their own. They bear a passing resemblance to one another, but each is quite unique. Bards are able to sing magical songs, which affect them and sometimes the entire party, until they stop singing. Bards know how to fight, but they are more interested in their songs. The Rogue is not quite a thief, not quite a warrior, and, at least to begin with, not quite an assassin. Rogues know how to fight, but they prefer to stab their enemies in the back instead. They can also steal from NPCs and eventually gain an assassinate ability as they grow more powerful.

These character classes represent the tip of the iceberg. In some ways, they are more for organizing quests than actually building the character. Behind these character classes are numerous skills, such as smithing, baking, and fishing. Some players have created characters and then gone on to spend their time in the game as a professional fletcher or armor smith. A player can even become a brewer, providing beer to the inns or other players. These skills are increased through practice, although some class-related skills, such as sneak, feign death, or double-attack, don't appear until the character has reached a certain "level." At first there were only fifty levels, but this has since been expanded considerably.

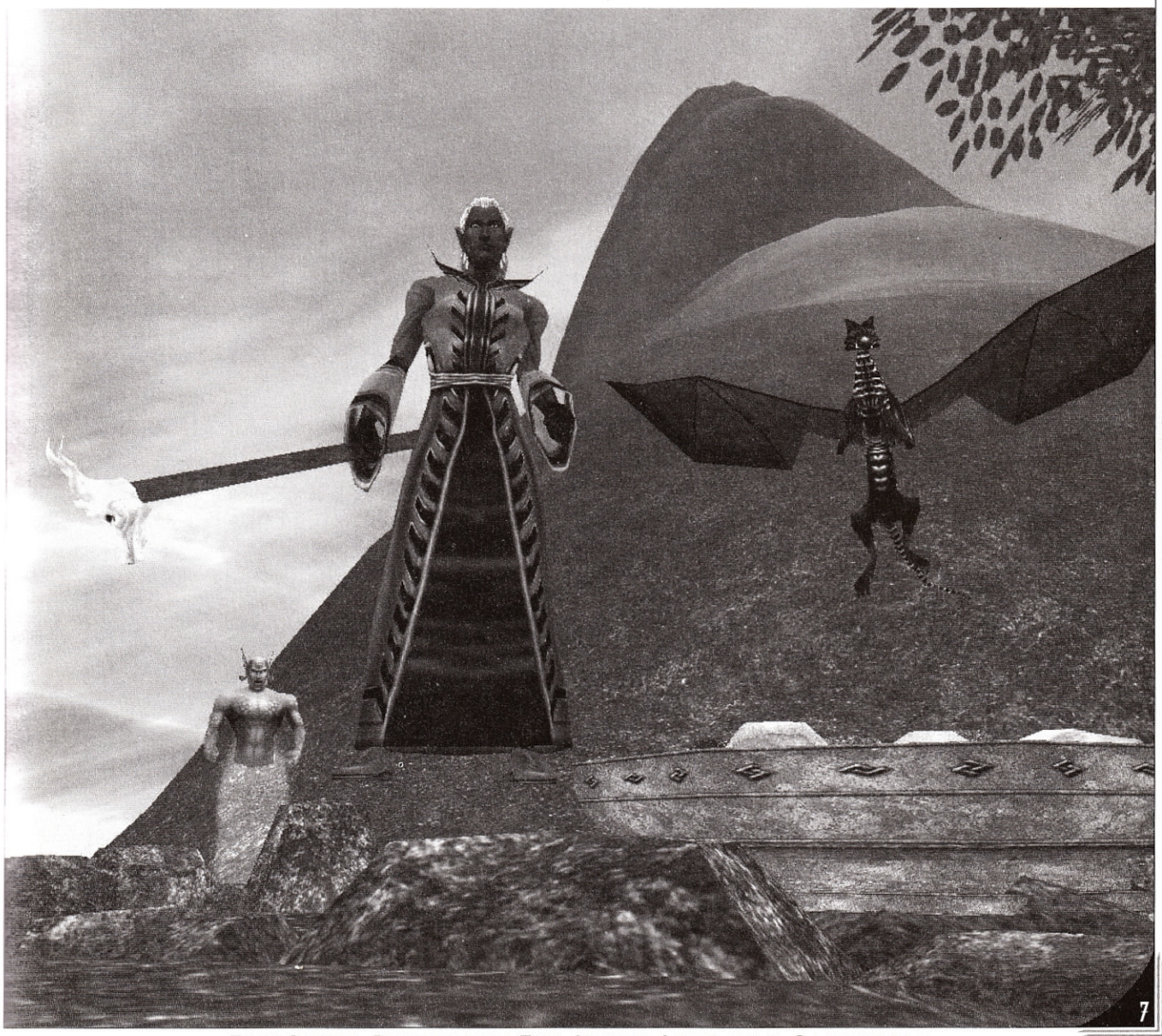
A character's advancement occurs in two separate ways. The first is through direct experience. When a player completes a part of a quest, such as delivering a special message to an NPC, the character often gets experience for its trouble. The other way that a player can get experience is through killing monsters, so long as the monster is within a certain "level" of the character. If the monster is rated too low a difficulty, the character won't get any experience for killing it. This experience is applied directly toward the character's level, although the second type of advancement can occur in the process. This second type

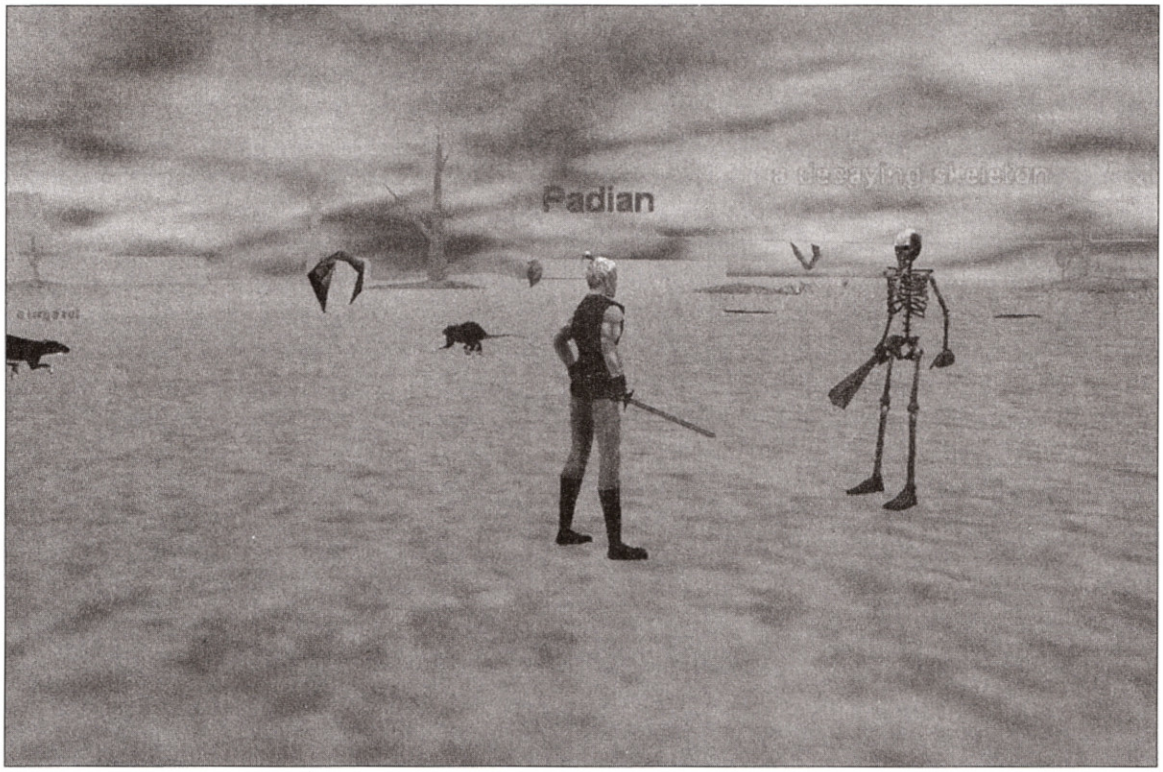
comes through practicing skills. Every time a character uses a skill, it gets a bit better at it. The skills themselves have levels, and once a player has enough practice, his or her skill level goes up. This sort of advancement does not apply to character level, however. While a character can become better at smithing by making armor, for example, it won't raise a warrior from level 7 to 8.

The skills and character classes allow players a rich experience, especially those who have never role-played before. The races and classes allow a new player to have an immediate focus to his or her character as they explore Norrath, while the wide range of skills allow more seasoned players to add an infinite variety of texture to their characters.

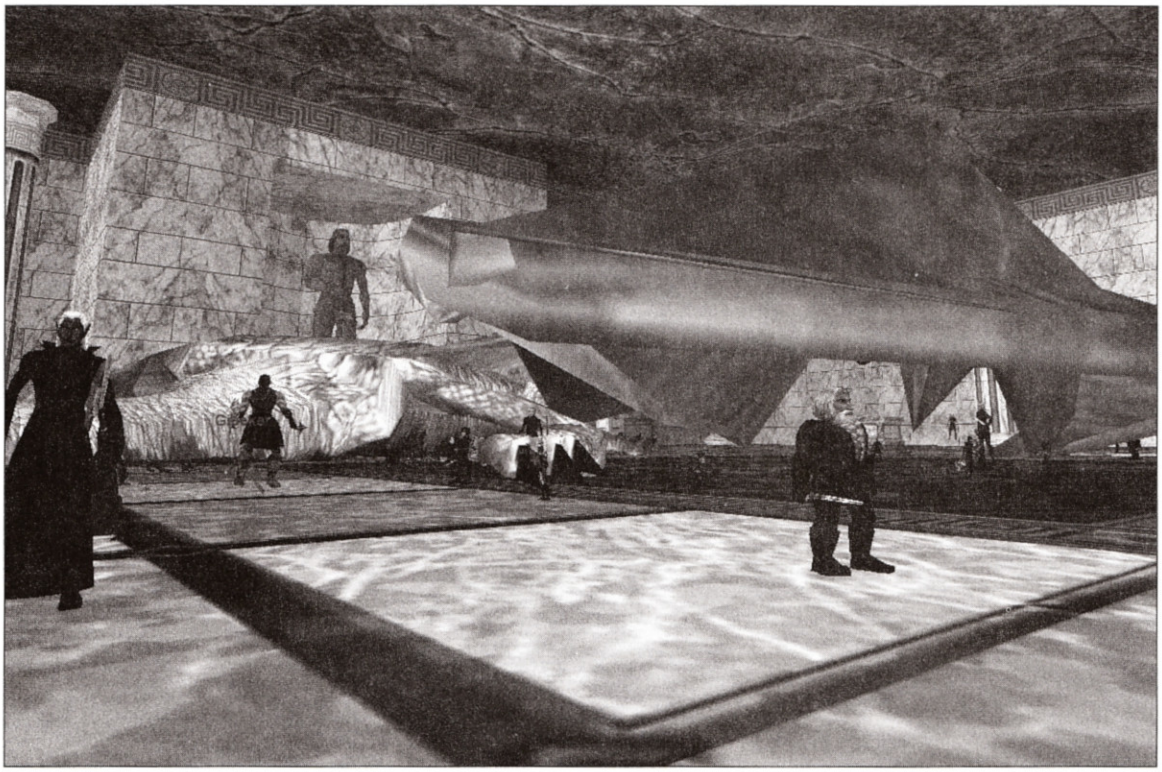
PLAYING THE GAME

At first glance, the gameplay looks quite simple. You wander around, kill monsters that cross your path, and spend your time trying to gain experience, occasionally completing a





A warrior during the "scavenger hunt" stage, in this case taking on a skeleton

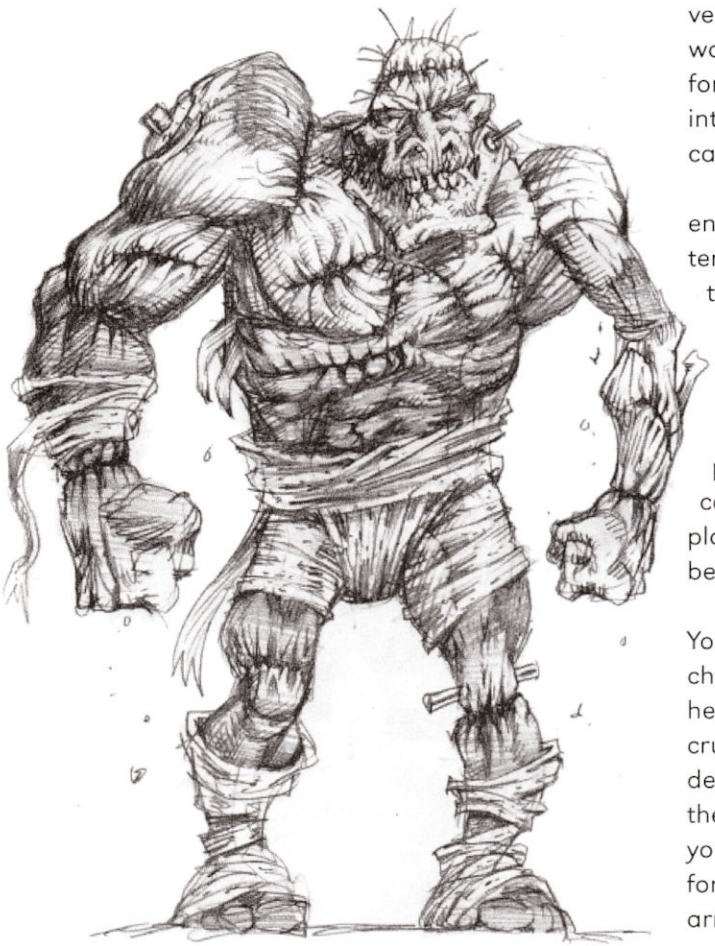


A large group at the end of a raid to kill a dragon

quest on the side. This is a deceptively simple conception of the game, however.

EverQuest is about a story, with each character race and class playing its own part in that story. Quests that seem to be quite small early on can quickly snowball into something much larger, as your character becomes embroiled in the greater story of the world.

For example, I started a Paladin in the human city of Freeport. One of the first quests I found was to locate and warn a spy who the Paladins had snuck into the corrupt Freeport militia. When I finally found the mole, he gave me a message to return to the Paladin headquarters. At this point, I thought the quest was over; little did I know that far more was to come.



The message was regarding a price list for a bladesmith in East Freeport whose shop had burnt down some time ago. The Paladin who had given me this quest used this knowledge to determine that the head of Freeport was looking for a powerful magical sword, and he instructed me to find it first. When I found out more about this quest, I learned that I would probably need a group of level 40 adventurers to finish it. Later on in the quest, my character would have to kill the leader of Freeport.

Many of the quests are like this, providing goals for players that will last long past the early part of the game. They intertwine as well; one warrior quest for those associated with the Freeport militia involves killing the very same spy the Paladins are trying to warn. However, some quests are designed for low-level characters, with the express intention of building them up so that they can participate in the larger story.

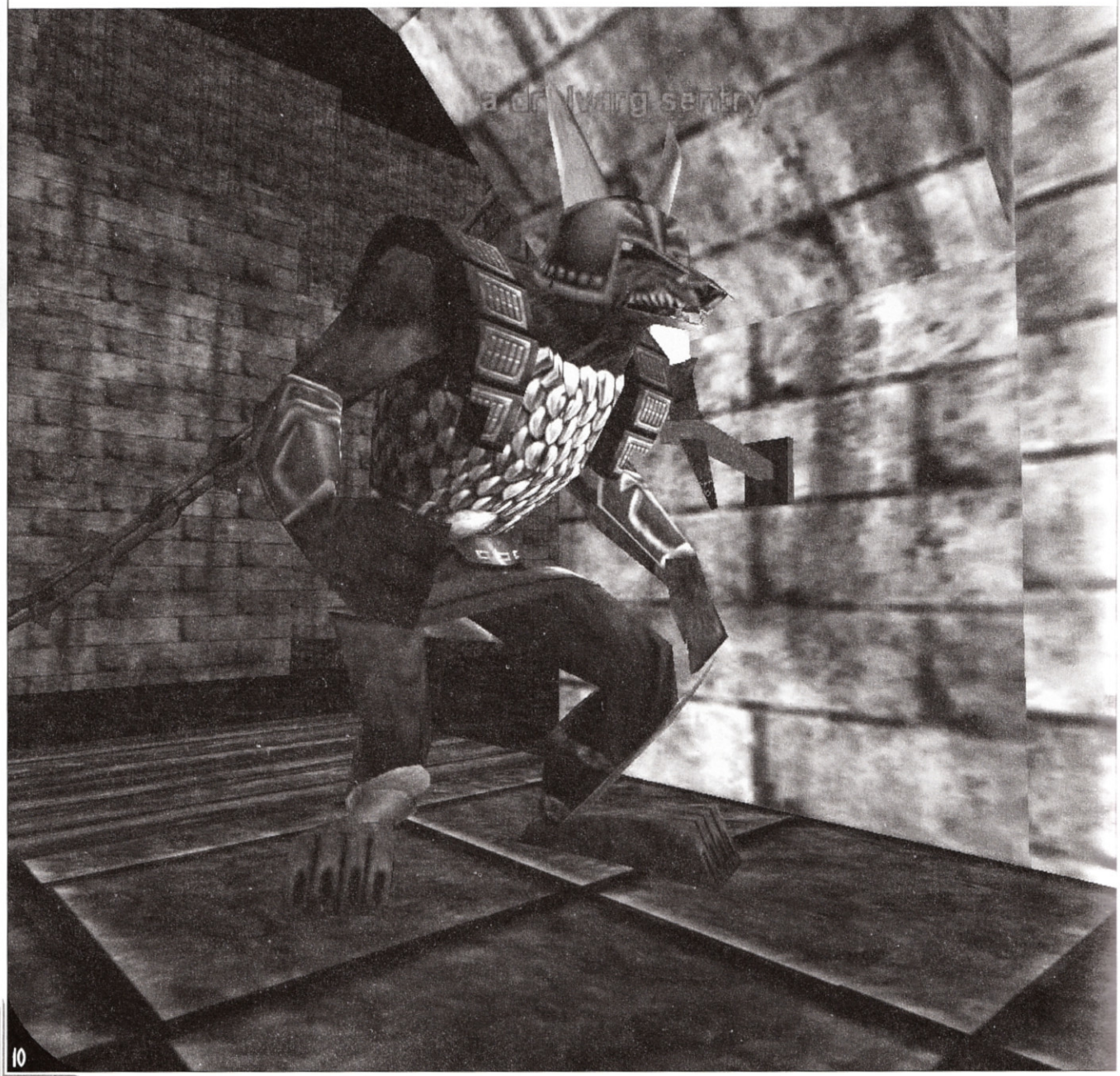
This can probably be called the "scavenger hunt" stage of the game. Each character class has its own special type of armor that you can make. When you begin in your professional guild (not to be confused with player guilds, which will be covered later on in the chapter), one of the trainers will ask you to take a series of tests to prove yourself. The trainer will hand you a container, in which you are instructed to place a group of ingredients that will later become the material for your armor.

These ingredients can be quite bizarre. You'll find them close to and inside your character's home city. A Dwarven Warrior's helm, for instance, requires two bricks of crude bronze, one Aviak chick talon, one spider leg, and one piece of fishing bait. Once these ingredients are assembled in the box, you click on the *Combine* button to transform them into a piece of material for the armor. You then take the material and a

mold provided by your trainer, combine them in a forge, and create the helmet, or breastplate, or whatever it is you are working on.

Once you have crafted an entire set of armor, you should be of a level where you can complete other, more storyline-related quests. For example, one of the Steel Warrior quests from Freeport has the character ferreting out and then killing a traitor and her Dark Elf courier. Neither NPC can be killed until the character has reached level 15 or so.

As your character reaches higher levels, the game becomes more oriented toward teamwork with other players. Many a player may find themselves working alone through the scavenger hunt portion of a character's life, but when the character reaches the



main storyline quests, it can be almost impossible to complete them alone. Monsters show an increasing tendency to team up on players, and even the stated difficulty of a given monster is based on team-based combat after a certain level.

The later part of a character's life could be called the "raiding" stage. Raids occur when a group of players get together and begin to sweep out an area of monsters, usually hunting for a single quest goal. These are different from low-level party combat, with a single character set aside as the raid leader responsible for dividing up the loot from the raid among the participants. The rest of the raid tends to consist of several groups, six players in each.

It is often at this point that many players become involved with guilds—although it can happen earlier, depending on the guild. As characters reach above level 20, the players are often considered to have proven themselves to their fellow gamers and can be recruited into player-based guilds (covered in detail in Chapter 6). These guilds have a number of different foci, but many still revolve around raiding areas and completing quests.

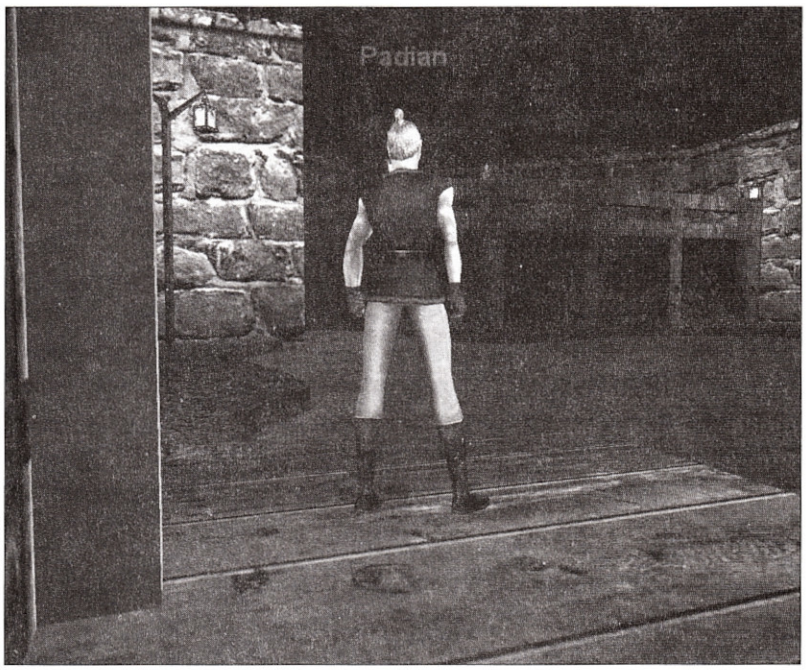
On certain servers, higher-level characters may find themselves warring with guilds that are not their own. As one member of the Dark Jedi Knights (a player-killer guild) told me, the members will mount raids against entire towns, clearing away all player characters in a Genghis Khan-style attack. These sorts of guild wars are common on player versus player servers, which are set aside from the standard *EverQuest* servers.

The most important aspect of the game, however, is not the questing or monster hunting—it is the community itself. One only has to start playing with a small group or read the *out-of-character* chat lines to realize that the game does contain a community, and a very friendly one.

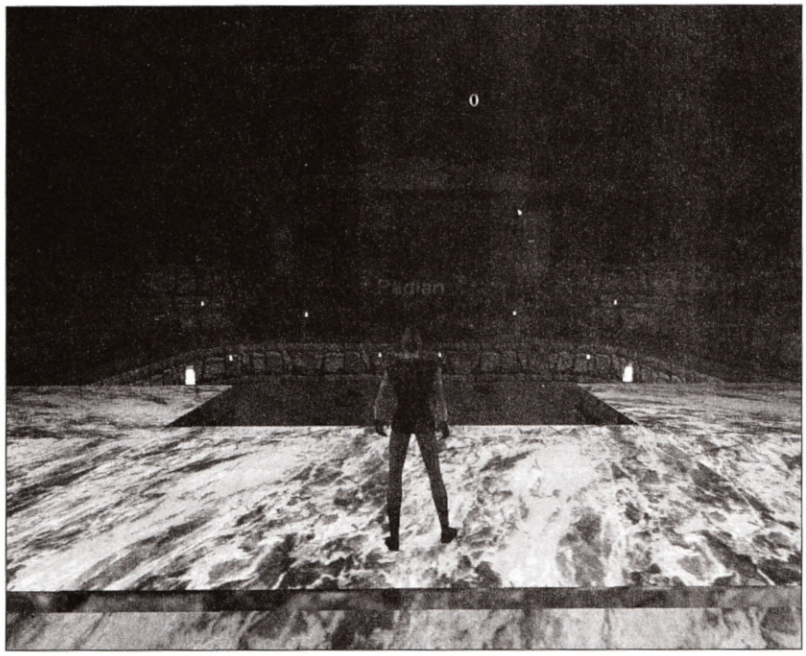
A SAMPLE ADVENTURE

Let's say you've never played *EverQuest*. What will your first playing experience be like?

The first thing you will do is select a server, and then you'll create a character. For the purposes of this chapter, let's say you've just created a human agnostic warrior named Padian on one of the standard servers. The professional guild to which a character belongs is determined by the character's race (human), religion (agnostic), and class (warrior). Padian belongs to the Steel Warriors guild. In Padian's inventory is a short sword, some rations, and a note.



Padian starting off in the Steel Warrior's guild



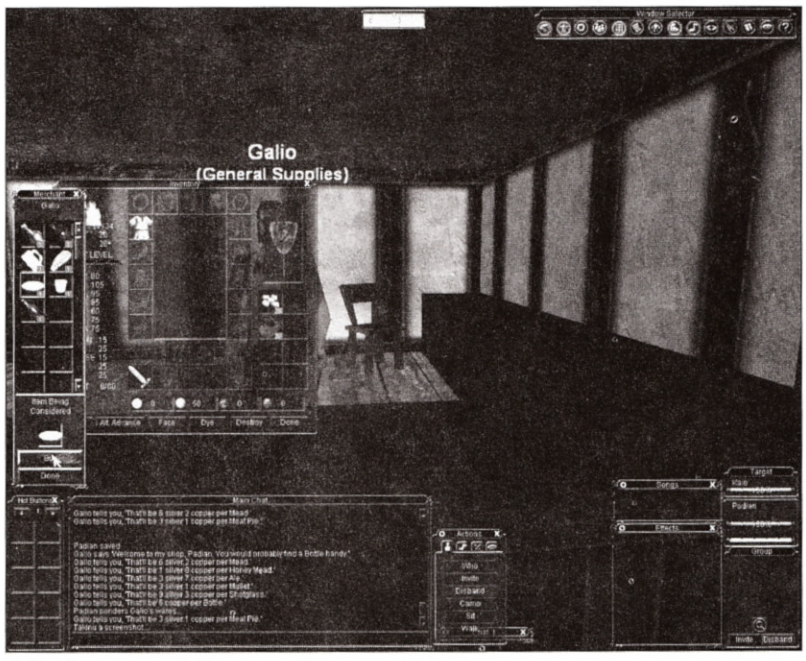
Padian visits the arena.

The first thing Padian will do is take the note to his guild leader, who is, rather handily, right across the room in which Padian starts.

The guild leader informs Padian about a war between the Steel Warriors and the Deathfist Orcs outside and gives him a tunic. At this point, Padian wanders around and explores for a bit. He finds a pair of forges in the back of the guild hall, along with some NPCs who will eventually give him quests, once he asks for them.

Padian then wanders outside. The weather can vary; when it rains, it *rains*. He moves his sword into his hand, and puts on his tunic, giving him some small protection against whatever monsters may be out there. Just beside the Steel Warrior guild he finds the arena, where one of the NPCs gives him his mail-making kit and the mold for his first piece of armor—an enchanted helmet. Padian also trains with her, increasing his proficiency in direction sensing, one-handed slashing, and smithing. By this point, around 10 to 15 minutes have probably passed in real life.

Padian has a simple recipe that he has to put together for his helmet. He needs a brick of crude iron ore, a rat ear, a meat pie, and some barley. He doesn't have any money, so



Padian buys a meat pie from a merchant.

the meat pie and barley are outside of his reach right now. However, everything will change with time.

Padian walks to the West Gate of Freeport, not too far away from the Steel Warrior's guild. Just outside the city, he can see a number of creatures, along with some other adventurers hunting them. Several rats scuttle about, along with snakes and fire beetles. This is where Padian is going to get his first experience as a warrior.

Wandering outside, Padian starts to consider some of the wildlife around him. The fire beetles are a bit too tough for him to tackle, but the snakes and rats are fine. Each time he kills a creature, it drops some body parts, which he picks up. One of the snakes drops some scales and teeth, while a rat drops a tail and eyeball.

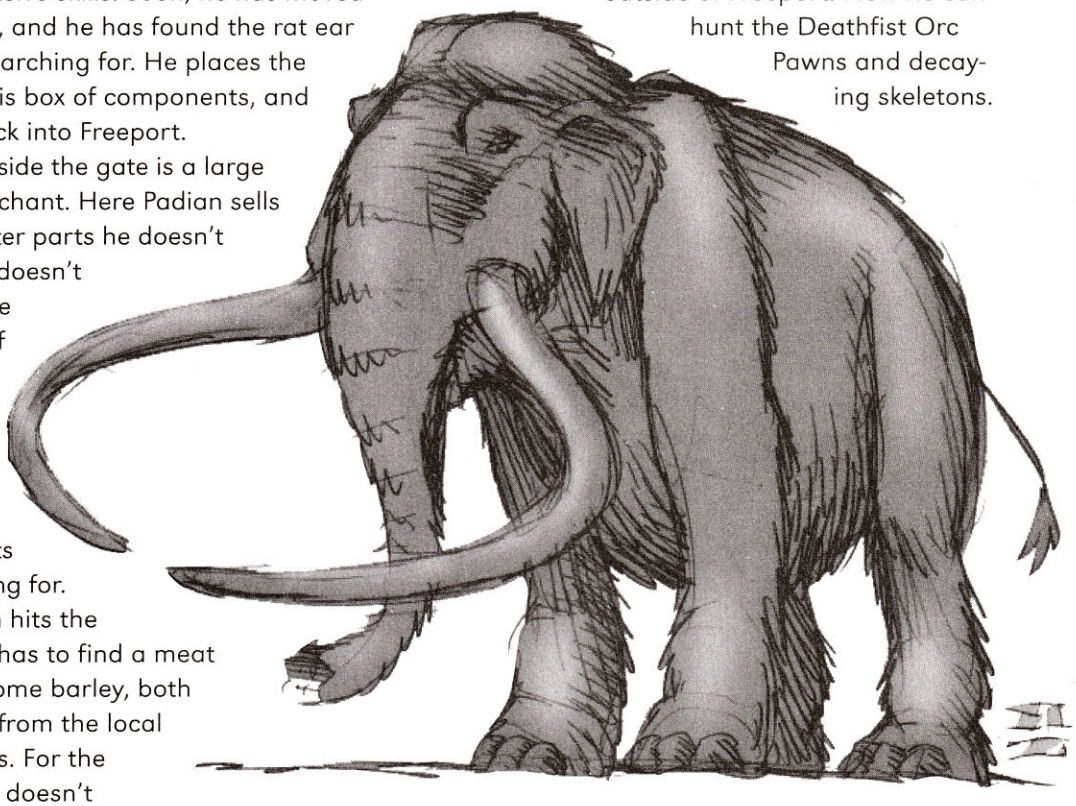
As he's fighting, Padian is gaining experience, both toward his level and his offensive and defensive skills. Soon, he has moved up a level, and he has found the rat ear he was searching for. He places the ear into his box of components, and heads back into Freeport.

Just inside the gate is a large Ogre merchant. Here Padian sells the monster parts he doesn't need. He doesn't get a large amount of money, but it's enough to buy the other ingredients he's looking for.

Padian hits the town. He has to find a meat pie and some barley, both available from the local merchants. For the barley, he doesn't have to go too far afield; a merchant is selling the stuff just outside of the western passage to North Freeport. He buys a bag of barley, and then heads into North Freeport, searching for a meat pie.

He explores several inns before he finds a pie, but he is finally able to buy one in the market square. Padian now has only one last ingredient to locate—the brick of crude iron ore. He has a couple of options at this point: he can hunt around the merchants and see if somebody else has sold a brick, or he can head back to the West Gate and try to kill something carrying one.

Padian is now more seasoned than he was at the beginning of the session. He's nowhere near being an *uber*-character, like Conan the Cimmerian in a Robert E. Howard story—far from it. A lion could kill him with a sneeze. However, he is now far more capable of taking on the more difficult creatures just outside of Freeport. Now he can hunt the Deathfist Orc Pawns and decaying skeletons.



Padian occasionally sees a skeleton carrying a sword or axe as he's hunting. In these cases, he attacks right away, as the weapon the skeleton is using is better than his short sword. When he kills the creature, it drops the weapon, which he can then use. With his new axe in hand, Padian can go in search of the ore.

There's a problem, however: to find the brick of ore he needs, Padian has to go farther away from Freeport, into a new area known as the Commonlands. Here he will find Orc Pawns, which carry bricks of crude iron ore. The Orcs tend to gang up on people, however, making Padian's situation very precarious.

Happily, Padian has noticed another adventurer, who looks as though she is a bit stronger. This is Kaie, a level 4 Paladin from North Freeport, off to make armor of her own. Padian strikes up a conversation, and then he offers to form a party with Kaie. Kaie agrees, and the two set out into the Commonlands. At this point, perhaps an hour and a half has passed in the real world.

As they come into the Commonlands, the first thing that Padian and Kaie see is a light forest. A couple of NPC guards are standing around, and if the two adventurers are overcome by Orc Pawns or other creatures, they can run back to the guards for help. At several huts in the forest, the characters can buy and sell various items.

Padian and Kaie don't have to venture far before they come across two Orc Pawns. The Pawns attack, hurting Padian badly, but the adventurers are able to defeat them. As Padian sits down to rest, allowing him to recover hit points more quickly, Kaie stands guard. They were unlucky this time; neither Orcs had bricks, although one had some cloth armor that will make Padian a bit richer when he sells it at a local inn. Padian has also gained some extra experience—while the experience of fighting the monsters is split evenly among the players, a bonus is applied

TALES FROM alt.games.everquest

I had the help of a friend who got me into the game (and now doesn't play anymore-lol).

He was also something of a newb [short for "newbie" or "newcomer"], but had many of the basics plus some experience in the buying and selling of stuff. After that, however, I really depended on the people I met. I occasionally got teased, but that was fine when done in proper spirit (which I did most of the time).

I have since made quite an effort to help newbs. My all-time record for newbiedom was when I was playing my then level 5 mage. I logged in for [what] was to be just a few minutes outside Felwithe, where I had camped after a trainer/spell purchase, and suddenly found a invite request with no "wanna group?" or any thing like that. I figured, what the heck, and took it to find a 7 mage on the other side of things. She proceeds to just start wacking wasps and bats, plus the occasional Orc Pawn—all greens all the time. I mentioned something about perhaps going up to Orc hill or at least closer to Kelethin, and got a "Where's that?"

The long and the short of it was that she had somehow gotten to level 7 by hunting within several hundred units of the Felwithe entrance. I have no idea how she made it as high as [level] 7 there. Despite the fact that [I] needed to go to bed, I spent the next hour explaining the concept of experience points and mob difficulty to her, running her to Kelethin, getting her bound, killing a few things, and eventually finding her a level 10 to go to Orc Hill with. I then had a brief conversation with the 10 about taking care of the newb.

I only hope she did well after that....

—"JustMe"

Padian and Kaie encounter an Orc Pawn on their way to the Commonlands.

to characters when they kill something while cooperating in a party of two or more.

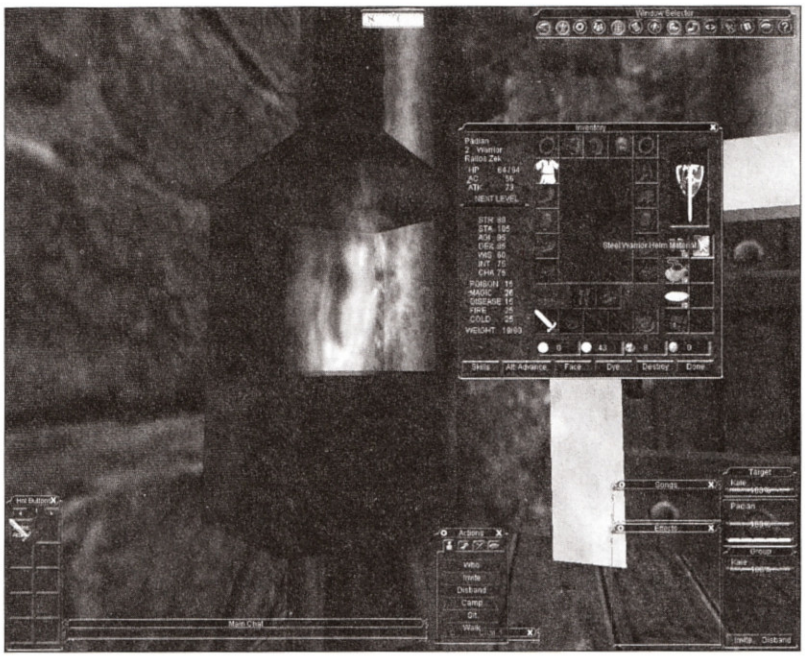
They strike out again, with night falling. As it becomes darker and darker, Padian is forced to rely on Kaie to lead him, for alone he isn't strong enough to survive. They fight a couple of Black Wolves, earning Padian his third level, but they steer clear of the occasional Shadow Wolf—while Padian will have to hunt them later, right now he is still too weak.

Kaie is searching for Orc Prayer beads, and as they stop at an inn to sell their booty, she finds that the innkeeper has some for a good price. This leaves both of them looking for bricks of crude iron ore. They set out again, the rising sun peeking over the horizon.

Finally, after an encounter with a skeleton and a couple of Black Wolves, Padian and Kaie find and kill an Orc Pawn carrying a brick of crude iron ore. Kaie gives the brick to Padian, who combines it, the rat ear, barley, and meat pie together in his mail-making box. He has now made a new item, called *Steel Warrior Helm Material*. This he will have to take to a forge, but he doesn't want to leave Kaie yet. Kaie still needs a brick for herself.

Once again, the two go hunting. Along the way, they come across a group of three

Padian and Kaie fight some black wolves.



Padian begins to make his helmet at the forge.

characters fighting a giant spider that's more than twice as large as they are. They watch for a moment as the other party kills the spider, looking forward to the time when they can hunt similar prey.

Heading off into the wilderness, they find another Orc Pawn, which they slaughter. As the Orc falls, Padian is informed that his faction standings have changed—the Deathfist Orcs hate him more, while the commons residents like him a bit better and are more likely to offer him a good deal. Kaie kneels down to loot the corpse, finding a brick of crude iron ore, along with a pickaxe and Deathfist scalp. She combines her items to create the material for her next piece of armor, a pair of bracers.

Padian heads back to Freeport, Kaie leading the way. Once they enter the gates of the city, they go their separate ways—Kaie has some errands she wants to take care of in the Paladin guild, and Padian has to make his armor. For this, Padian goes to the back yard of the Steel Warrior guild house. By the door, he starts using a forge. He places the mold for the helmet and the material he's just made on the forge, and then he combines them. Suddenly, his smithing skill has gone up, and he's holding a magical helm, which will help protect him when he heads out to find the ingredients for his next piece of armor.

For now, though, Padian must rest. He sits down and begins to set up camp. Thirty seconds later, he is camped for the night, and the game session is over. In the real world, perhaps about two to three hours have passed.

As Padian progresses, the character will be spending more and more time in larger groups, heading out to complete quests. For now, though, Padian has only scratched the tip of the iceberg.

One of the reasons that a game like *EverQuest* has so much depth is that it comes from a long tradition of fantasy and gaming. To understand just where the game and, to a degree, the experience comes from, we have to start at the beginning.

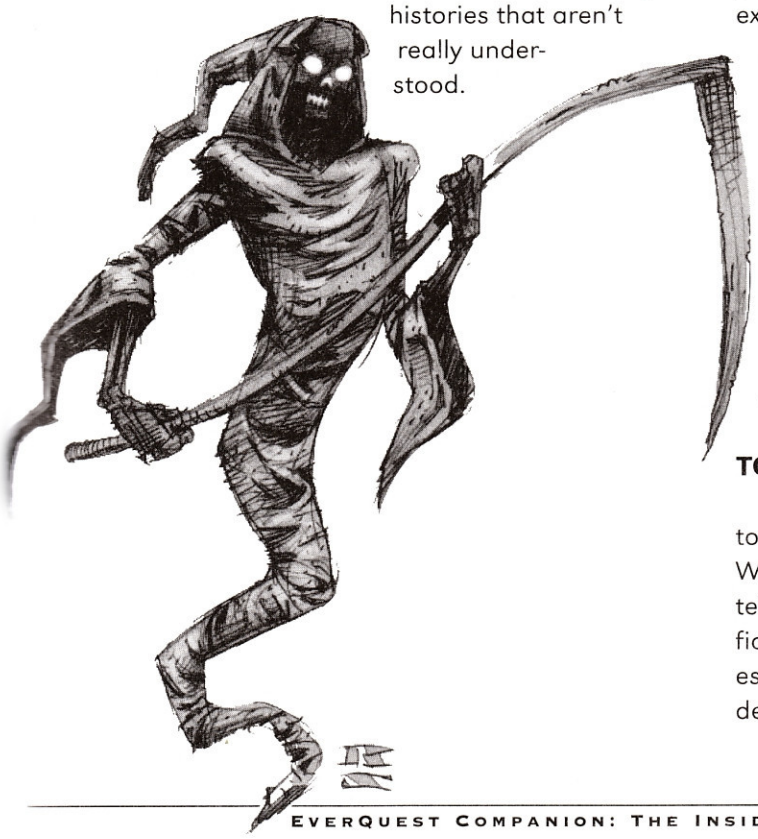
THE FOUNDING OF A GAME GENRE

CHAPTER 2

"ANCIENT IS VALUSIA!" WHISPERED KULL. "THE HILLS OF ATLANTIS AND MU WERE ISLES OF THE SEA WHEN VALUSIA WAS YOUNG."

—ROBERT E. HOWARD, THE SHADOW KINGDOM

EverQuest belongs to two traditions—the fantasy genre and the Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG). For some odd reason, both traditions have long histories that aren't really understood.



Many have claimed that fantasy is a genre of the twentieth century alone, created by an Oxford professor named J.R.R. Tolkien, and that *EverQuest* and other games like it are part of a group of games that didn't even exist prior to 1995.

EverQuest exploded onto the market with enviable timing, quickly becoming the most successful North American MMORPG of its time. But before we can look at how the game itself was developed, the stage must be set. To do that, we'll start with the history of fantastic literature itself. And that is a journey that will take us back far beyond the twentieth century. In fact, it will take us back around 500 years.

TOMES OF LORE

One of the dangers of discussing the history of fantasy is trying to define the genre. With literature, sometimes it is difficult to tell whether what is written is an author's fictional fantasy or whether the author honestly believes that the magical creatures described in the tale actually exist. We must

COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA LIBRARY, CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA

Horace Walpole (1717-1797), the author of *Castle of Otranto*. From a portrait by Nathaniel Hone, R.A., in the National Gallery. Frontispiece of v. 4 of Walpole, Horace, *Memoirs of the Reign of King George the Third*. London, Lawrence and Bullen, (1894)

somehow draw the line between the mythological versus the fantastic.

Fantasy itself is a story written by and credited to an individual, using magical archetypes that the author knows are nonexistent. The first stories that meet this criteria appear in the sixteenth century. Prior to this point, the genre of knightly romances, while containing magical elements, was thought by both public and author to depict what existed in reality. Around 1550, a number of books appeared in Europe that were known as "artificial" or "decadent" romances. These contained stories of heroes, usually knights, contending with wizards, demons, giants, ogres, dwarves, ghosts, and a number of other magical creations that would sound remarkably familiar to the modern reader (even though the prose style tended to be thicker than concrete).

The next major development in fantastic literature didn't occur until the eighteenth century, as England, beginning its transformation in the industrial revolution, began to churn out its own type of fantastic literature. These were the *gothic romances*, a term coined by Walpole when he published *Castle of Otranto* in 1764. The gothic romances had a darker tone than the earlier work in the genre. These were stories of young maidens trapped in towering and haunted castles by ruthless usurpers, while the true heir to the throne tried desperately to rescue them. The fantastic elements of these novels were more what we would now associate with horror than heroic fantasy. Ghosts, vampires, werewolves, and devils abounded. It is not surprising that as the industrial revolution

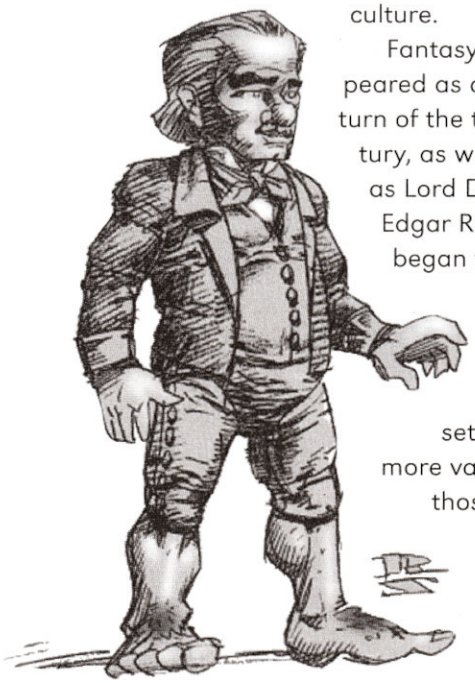
gained force, the gothic romance soared in popularity, even affecting literature on continental Europe.

It is tempting to say that this history gives fantasy a proud literary tradition, but this is not the case. While both the artificial romances and gothic novels were popular, they were considered a curiosity in the literary community of the time, with few attributes worthy of note.

COURTESY OF LEO GRIM

Robert E. Howard (1906-1936)

Between the end of the Gothic novels in the 1820s and the beginning of the resurgence of fantasy, an author named William Morris did something that would change the genre forever. Writing short prose romances for *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* in the 1850s, Morris set his stories in an invented world where magic was a fact of life. He also used mythology as his framework, borrowing heavily from Nordic and Medieval culture.



Fantasy again appeared as a genre at the turn of the twentieth century, as writers such as Lord Dunsany and Edgar Rice Burroughs began to churn out volumes of fantastic adventure stories. The settings were more varied than those of the past; for example, Burroughs's heroes' venues ranged from the jungles of Africa to a Martian landscape that wouldn't be out of place in any fantasy novel. As the pulp magazines came into their own, modern fantasy solidified; Robert E. Howard and H.P. Lovecraft became the masters of fantasy in the early and mid-1930s, rising above their numerous competitors to shape the genre as we see it today. Howard's Conan is one of the most enduring fantasy heroes of the twentieth century, and Lovecraft's *Dream Cycle* can still hold its own, 70 years after the stories were written.

Howard died in 1936, leaving a Hyborean Age detailed enough to rival Tolkien's Middle-earth, and Lovecraft passed away a year later, becoming a father of modern horror. By this time, the pulp magazines were extremely popular, and they left a legacy that would inspire hundreds of writers.

The trend that marked most of mainstream twentieth-century fantasy was the use of mythology. Following Morris's example, Dunsany drew heavily on Celtic tradition to create his imagined world at the turn of the century. Howard used mythological names and creatures for his Hyborean age in the 1930s; less than a decade later, L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt took it one step further when they had their hero, Harold Shea, venturing into the myths themselves. Fantasy was popular, but in literary circles it remained a curiosity.

Between the Conan stories of Howard and de Camp and Pratt's tales of Harold Shea, a book was published in England that almost remained a footnote. In 1937, an Oxford professor named John Ronald Raoul Tolkien published *The Hobbit*, a quaint story for children

set in Middle-earth, an invented world based on Scandinavian myth. It gained critical acclaim, but it did little that hadn't already been done by the American pulp writers. Had Tolkien written *The Hobbit* and left Middle-earth at that, it would been forgotten in the face of writers such as Howard and de Camp.

And then, in the aftermath of World War II, Tolkien published what became the most important of all the fantasy novels of the twentieth century—*The Lord of the Rings*. The epic novel, printed in three parts between 1954 and 1955 by Rayner Unwin, quite literally changed the genre, although not by pre-

senting some revolutionary new concept. Indeed, many of the American pulp writers had already used mythology in their work in a similar way as Tolkien.

However, *The Lord of the Rings* was filled with literary resonance and had level upon level that could be appreciated by those who knew what to look for. The book included linguistic jokes (such as "King Theoden," which translates from Old English as "King King"); numerous references to Nordic, Finnish, and Celtic myth; considered moral ideas; and even dipped into theology on more than one occasion. It was, put simply, literature, and it was literature intricate enough that students are still writing doctoral theses on it.

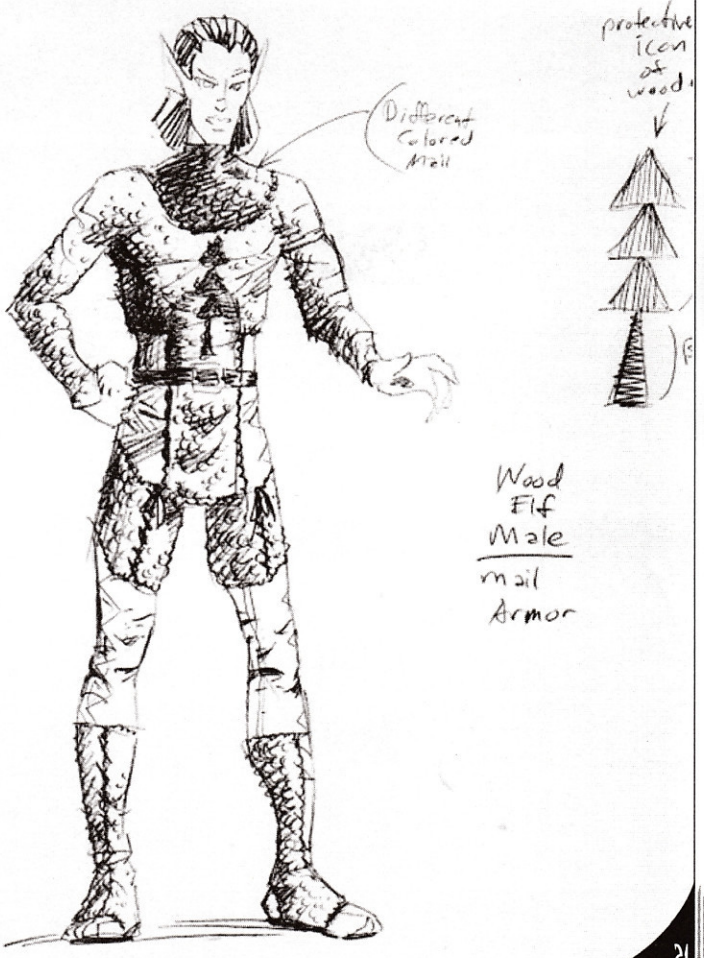
Naturally, the critical community, used to fantasy as a pulp genre, hated it. They couldn't work out what to do with it, and many predicted that the book's incredible popularity would wane. In the shadow of almost 50 years in print and a trilogy of films that may even redefine the medium, this has become a pessimistic, and wildly inaccurate, prediction.

The reaction to Tolkien among fantasy authors is mixed. Some love him, and some hate him. However, the overall effect was a positive one for the genre. With *The Lord of the Rings*, it had been proven, beyond all possible doubt, that fantasy could be literature. It was a legitimacy that had been lacking in the genre up to that point.

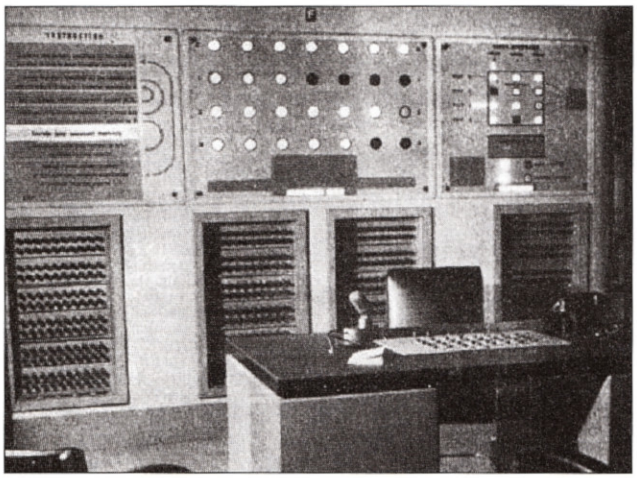
The legacy of Tolkien's epic is overpowering. Many people believe that fantasy began with his work, and the authors who have tried to copy him are now too numerous to be counted. Tolkien's elves, dwarves, and orcs have become permanent fixtures in the genre, with almost every fantasy game using at least some elements of *The Lord of the Rings*. The influence of Tolkien's work has even stretched as far as Japan, where his elves appear in animated fantasy series, such as *Record of Lodoss Wars*. With mythical fantasy now ingrained into Western culture, and a legion of authors expanding the genre in new and original ways (a great example of this is Michael Moorcock, whose *Eternal Champion* series still rises above most of the genre), it is not terribly surprising that when it came time to make games, fantasy would be at the top of the list.

BABY STEPS AND GIANT LEAPS

We now have to take a step sideways. The genre of *EverQuest* was firmly established by 1960, thanks in large part to the impact of *The Lord of the Rings*. But the technology that would allow the development of the MMORPG also had to develop and finally merge with its literary influences. To see those beginnings, we have to start in Europe in 1951.



If you went back in time to trade shows in London and Berlin in that year, you would find a tremendous commotion over a pavilion set aside for a British company named Ferranti. Inside was something truly new—a computer games console that would play *Nim*, a simple strategy game using 16 matches. The console was called Nimrod, and for the first time, a computer was designed solely to play games.

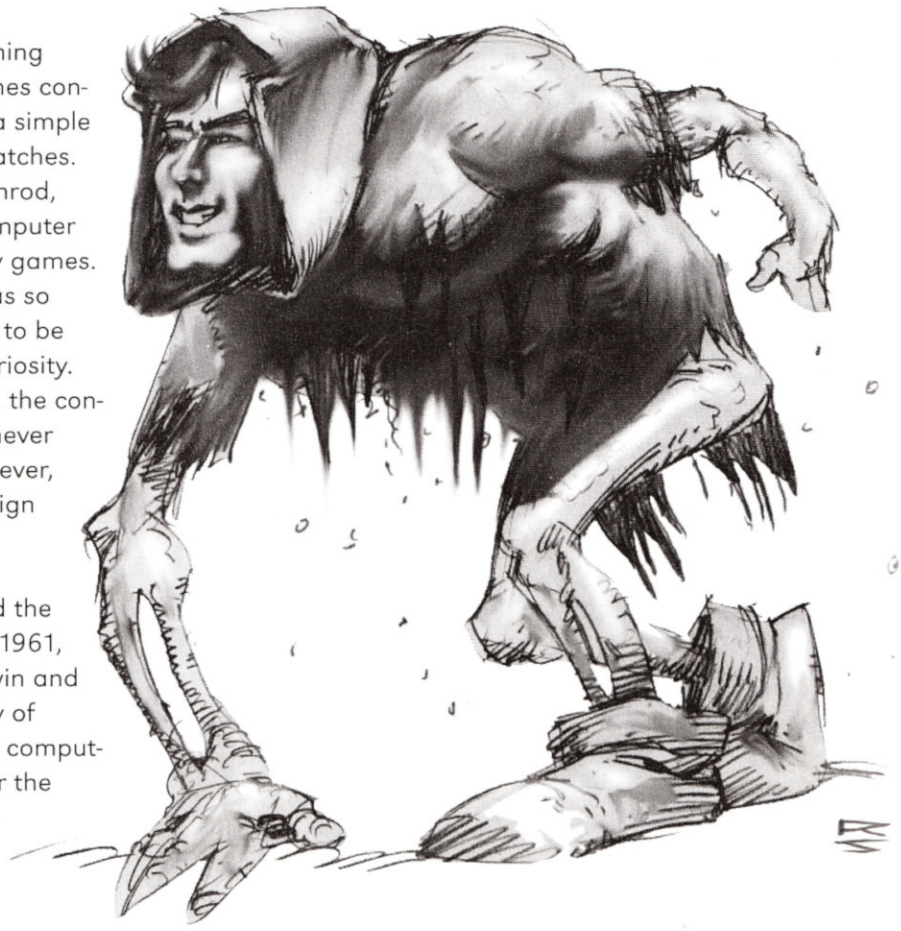


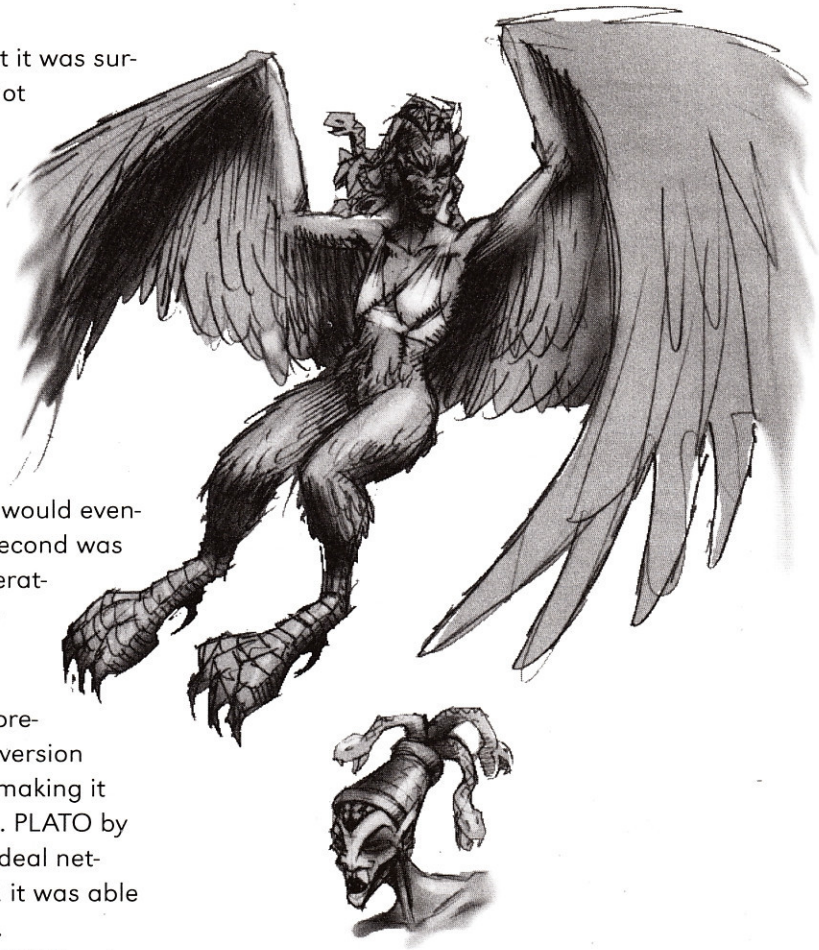
Nimrod

Although excitement was so intense that the police had to be called in, Nimrod was a curiosity. After the 1951 Berlin show, the console was taken apart and never rebuilt by its creators. However, as we now know, it was a sign of things to come.

Another decade passed before the next step toward the online game was taken. In 1961, Professors Chalmers Sherwin and Don Bitzer of the University of Illinois developed PLATO, a computerized education system for the university's ILLIAC computer system. It was successful enough that it was still being used across North America a decade and a half later, and it saw at least four versions. PLATO was a unique system, as it allowed time-sharing—a vital element for the online games to come. It also had graphical capabilities, with the ability to use a high-resolution monochrome display. Contrary to popular belief, the name wasn't an acronym, although somebody later coined one: "Programmed Logic for Automatic Teaching Operations."

With computer systems now available in many of the universities, it wasn't long before a student created a game for them. Indeed, only a year after the development of PLATO, the first multiplayer computer game was created.





Spacewar! was a small game, but it was surprisingly advanced for its time. Not only was it graphical, but it was also a two-player game. On disk, it took up an entire 9 kilobytes.

1969 was a watershed year for online gaming. It wasn't so much a matter of baby steps, as that year saw three giant leaps that would influence the future of the medium. The first was a development in the Department of Defense—a large network named ARPANet, which would eventually become the Internet. The second was the development of the UNIX operating system, soon to be one of the backbones of ARPANet. Finally, Rick Blomme wrote *Two-player Spacewar* for PLATO. Unlike the previous versions of *Spacewar!*, this version could be played over a network, making it the first network computer game. PLATO by this time had developed into an ideal networking environment, as by 1972 it was able to host 1000 simultaneous users.

The next step toward the MMORPG actually had nothing whatsoever to do with computers. Between 1970 and 1971, Dave Arneson created a role-playing campaign titled *Blackmoor*. This was the first of its kind, but it quickly became something greater. When the second edition of *Chainmail*, a set of rules for a miniatures war game, was released in 1972, it contained a fantasy supplement that would inspire *Dungeons & Dragons*, which Arneson co-designed with Gary Gygax in 1973.

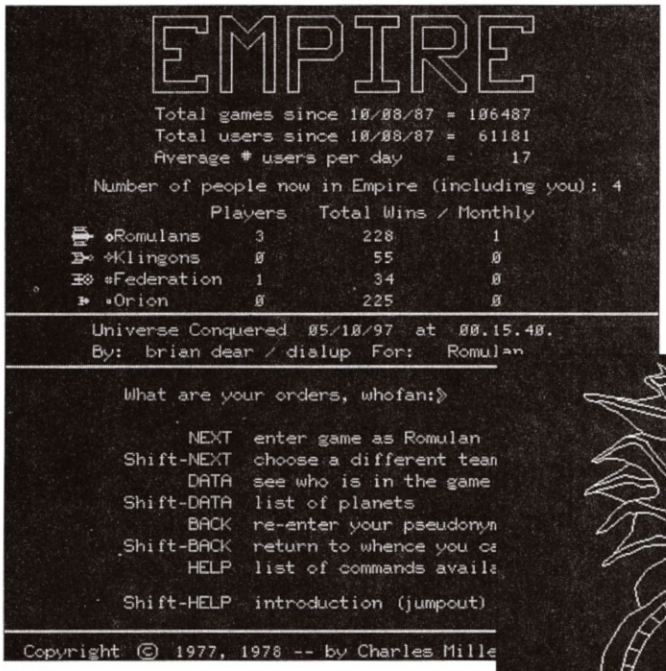
The same year that saw the second edition of *Chainmail* also saw what may have been the first computer maze game: *Hunt the Wumpus*, developed by Gregory Yob at the University of Massachusetts in Dartmouth. Although this was a primitive text-only game, it was operated on a time-sharing system, laying down another foundation for fantasy and adventure computer games.

By 1973, the first multiplayer flight simulation existed on PLATO. Known as *Dogfight*, it was a primitive game where players could challenge one another on a "big board" page. They would then duel on a two-dimensional board. At the same time, another foundation stone for the MMORPG had been developed on PLATO, a chat program called *Talk-O-Matic,* which could handle up to five people at a time.

1974 saw the next big steps: a PLATO network game titled *Empire*. Originally based on *Star Trek*, at first *Empire* could support up to 32 simultaneous players, but later it could support up to 60. The idea of the game was to drop armies on opposing planets, and

whichever team managed to take over the universe won the game, at which point the map would be reset.

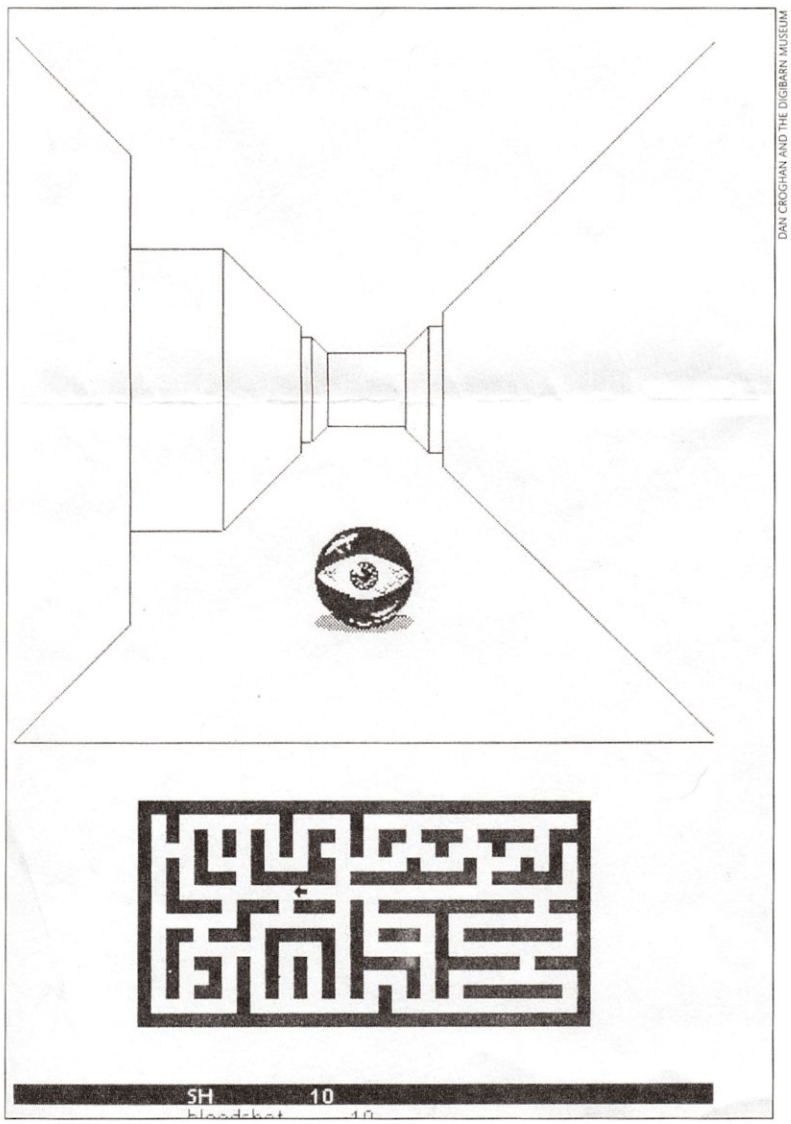
Empire was just one of several games that were now flourishing on university networks through the PLATO system. The first fantasy games appeared at this time, as Gary Whisenhunt and Ray Wood created *DND*, which may have also been known as *Avatar*. It is difficult to tell, as at this time games would be constantly improved, rewritten, and sometimes retitled. This made it possible for about 20 different versions of any game to be floating around at any given time.


EMPIRE
Total games since 10/08/87 = 106487
Total users since 10/08/87 = 61181
Average # users per day = 17
Number of people now in Empire (including you): 4
Players Total Wins / Monthly
•Romulans 3 228 1
•Klingons 0 55 0
•Federation 1 34 0
•Orion 0 225 0
Universe Conquered 05/10/97 at 00.15.40.
By: brian dear / dialup For: Romulan
What are your orders, whofan:
NEXT enter game as Romulan
Shift-NEXT choose a different tean
DATA see who is in the game
Shift-DATA list of planets
BACK re-enter your pseudonyn
Shift-BACK return to whence you ca
HELP list of commands availa
Shift-HELP introduction (jumpout)
Copyright © 1977, 1978 -- by Charles Mille
Empire

1974 could also be considered the year of the break-out. Where before, computer games were mostly limited to campus networks using PLATO, a number of programmers had graduated and moved into the corporate world, bringing their games with them. *DECwar* mirrored *Empire* on the VAX/VMS and PDP-10 computers, and David Kaufman wrote and published *Star Trader*, the precursor to *Trade Wars* (a now-famous bulletin-board system [BBS] science fiction door game), in BASIC. Dave Lebling and Greg Thompson wrote what is arguably the first first-person shooter, *Maze War*. This was a game for the Imlac PDS-1, that used a PDP-10 as the server. Players who remember marveling at *DOOM 2* would be surprised by it; *Maze War* could handle up to eight players at a time, allowed robots, and had chat capabilities.

Like the weave of a fine fabric, the links that would form the modern multiplayer computer gaming world were starting to intertwine. As Apple Computer was founded in 1976, Will Crowther created the first version of *ADVENT* using the FORTRAN programming language. The game was inspired by Arneson and Gygax's *Dungeons & Dragons*, and it was put on the PDP-10 by Don Woods, a version that inspired

M. St. Clair '84
avatar
Copyright (c) 1979-1985, 1990, 1991
Chris Alix, Mark Eastom, John Hegarty, Greg Janusz,
Tom Kirchman, Bruce Maggs*, John McKeown, Felix Ortony,
Andrew Shapira*, Dave Sides* *Original Author
Avatar



DAN CROGHAN AND THE DIGIBARN MUSEUM

Maze War

Lebling and Marc Blank to found Infocom and start working on the now-famous game *Zork* in 1977.

By 1978, the computer game world was already well populated, although the games had yet to enter the home. Programmers at universities and businesses continued to build on the games that already existed, occasionally taking steps that would change the industry. 1978 saw this happen at least twice. As a game on PLATO titled *Oubliette* defined the group-oriented dungeon with vector-based graphics, two games appeared that set the stage for things to come; these could be described as the first direct ancestors of *EverQuest*.

It was the year that saw the first Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs).

Two showed up in that first year, both created independently from each other. Rob Trubshaw and Richard Bartle at Essex University, inspired by a later version of *ADVENT* titled *DUNGEN*, created *MUD1*, which ran on a PDP-10 computer. At the same time, Alan Klietz wrote *Sceptre of Goth*. These were games in which numerous players could log into the server, create characters, and perform quests. They didn't have graphics, but they were extremely gripping and popular; *MUD1*, which ran for nine years, managed to eat up so much of the server's resources that the university limited play to evenings only.

It was the start of the MUD craze. Bartle shared the source code of *MUD1* with other universities for educational purposes, resulting in a proliferation of clones. By 1984, hundreds of MUDs had been created around the world, many of which were illegal copies of Bartle's original creation. *MUD1* would make one last giant leap with its final version, which went onto ARPANet in 1980, becoming the first

Internet MUD. Sixteen years later, when Brad McQuaid and Steve Clover at Verant designed *EverQuest*, it was the MUDs that would provide the primary inspiration.

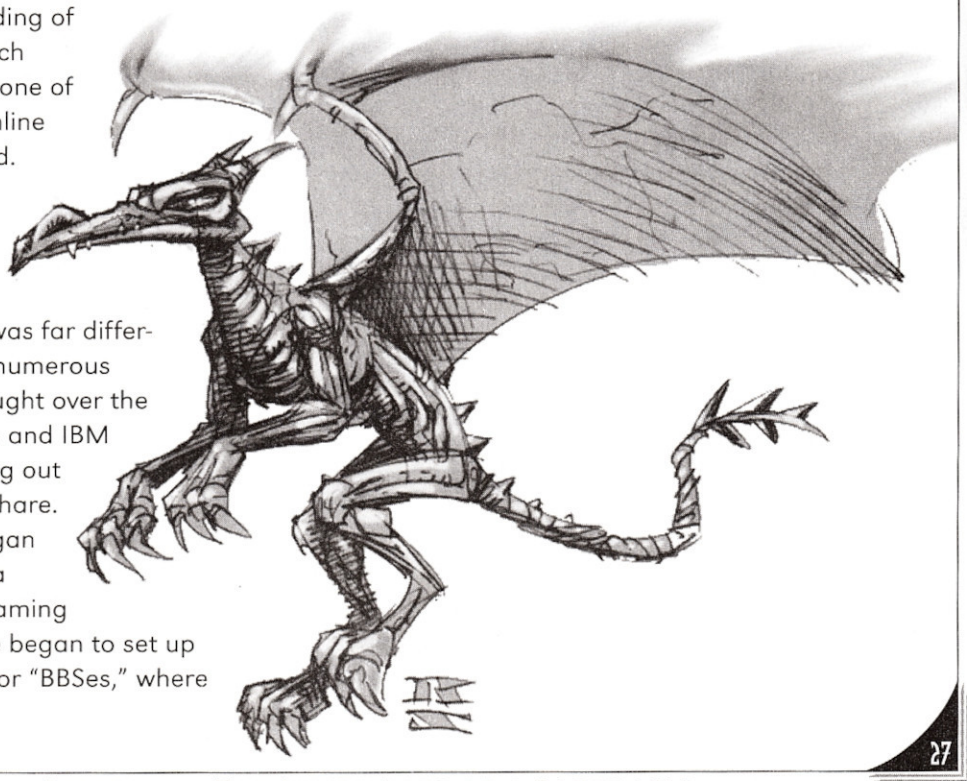
1980 also saw Kelton Flinn and John Taylor writing *Dungeons of Kesmai. Dungeons* was a relatively small multiplayer game that supported up to six players at a time. As Flinn later commented to Raph Koster, he didn't even know about MUDs when he wrote it; the game was an extension of a single player maze combat text-only game from 1979, in which Flinn was trying to capture the essence of *Dungeons & Dragons.*

Considering the other advances, *Dungeons of Kesmai* seems almost unworthy of mention. Indeed, Bartle's work had started an entire cottage industry among universities with a greater multiplayer capacity than *Dungeons* could ever dream of. However, it was a small start to something much greater. Between 1980 and 1981, Flinn and Taylor wrote a follow-up game titled *Island of Kesmai,* and it was then that they noticed an advertisement on CompuServe. The end result was the founding of Kesmai a year later, which would go on to become one of the first, and biggest, online game companies around.

At this time, the first personal computers had been coming out for a couple of years. The computer industry was far different then than it is now; numerous brands of computers fought over the marketplace, with Apple and IBM clones eventually winning out for most of the market share. As computers slowly began to appear in the home, a new type of computer gaming became possible. People began to set up Bulletin Board Systems, or "BBSes," where home computer users could dial-in using their modems, post messages, send electronic mail to one another, and even play door games. It wasn't long before companies like CompuServe, which often started as large BBSes, became big business.

At this point, CompuServe was leading the industry. The man in charge of games was Bill Louden, who now rightfully can be considered a visionary. When Louden was looking for games for people to play on CompuServe in 1981, Kesmai stepped up, and Louden liked what he saw. CompuServe already had a space war game under development, an updated version of *DECwar* that was released in 1983 as *MegaWars I.* It was one of the first online pay-for-play games, and it ran until 1998.

Louden liked what he saw with *Island of Kesmai,* and he told the company to get it ready for a large player population on CompuServe. The original UNIX code didn't work well with the CompuServe servers, requiring a reworking that would take place between



1982 and 1983. After a long internal test, on December 15, 1985, the release version, still using a text-only interface, launched on CompuServe as *Islands of Kesmai*. The cost to play was between $6 to $12 per hour, depending on the user's modem speed. Whether the designers realized it or not, they had just changed the face of the computer game industry. It was the birth of the Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG).

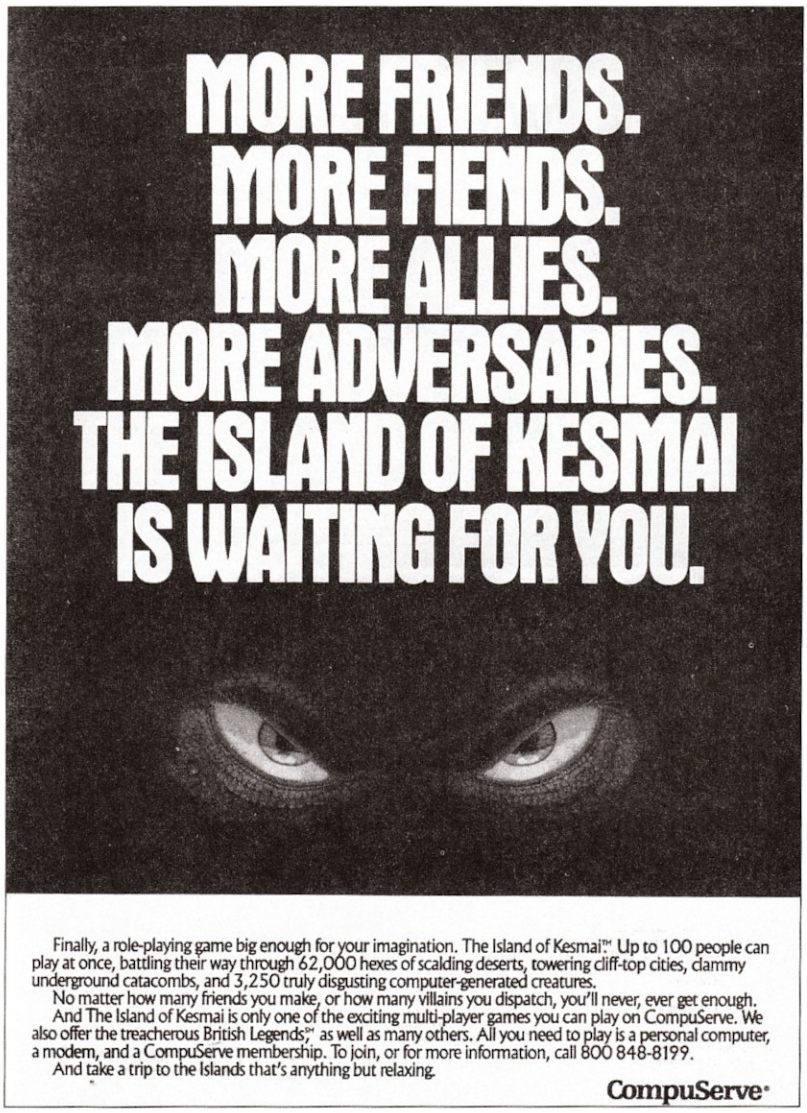
This immediately begs the question: What is the difference between a MUD and an MMORPG? There isn't any easy answer to that. To a degree, the difference comes down to professionalism. Most MUDs tend to be operated by volunteers and are not necessarily funded by a company. In most cases, they appear on university campuses and sometimes privately owned servers. The MMORPG is the product of an actual computer game company, however. It retains a staff of programmers and guides to help players out and fix bugs as they appear. It also usually has multiple servers to allow cross-country access.

As *Islands of Kesmai* was preparing to launch on CompuServe, another online role-playing game was launched by AUSI, a new company founded by Mark Jacobs, which would eventually become Mythic Entertainment, now best known for *Dark Age of Camelot*. The game was named *Aradath*, and it ran through a server in Jacobs's basement with eight phone lines attached. Although on a much smaller scale than the online games offered by CompuServe, *Aradath* used a new type of payment system, which would eventually become the industry standard—a monthly fee.

1985 marked the beginning of what Jessica Mulligan, an online game designer and industry columnist, calls the "Golden Age" of online games. Not only did *Islands of Kesmai* launch at the end of the year, but Louden, who had now left CompuServe, talked General Electric into starting GEnie, the first real competition against CompuServe, which at the time had around 250,000 subscribers. GEnie launched in October in a storm of media attention with an online rate of $6 per hour, followed in November by Quantum Computer Services' QuantumLink, a graphics-based online service for Commodore 64/128s. (Although QuantumLink may sound obscure, I can guarantee that everybody reading this book has actually heard of it—it was later renamed America Online.)

More history was made in 1986. In England, Bartle launched the sequel to *MUD1*; *MUD2* was a pay-for-play service. In the United States, GEnie launched its first online multiplayer game, Kesmai's reworking of *MegaWars I* titled *Stellar Warrior*. It also launched *Rim Worlds War*, designed and programmed by Jessica Mulligan—the first play-by-e-mail strategy game to appear on a commercial server. As *Stellar Warrior* launched, Kesmai began alpha testing on *Air Warrior*, the first true graphics-based massively multiplayer game. And, finally, after almost a year of nagging, Steve Case of Quantum Computer Services convinced Apple to let the company create a graphics-based online service for the Apple II.

From 1987 to 1992 there was a proliferation of massively multiplayer online games. Much of it amounted to baby steps—a refinement here and there, and occasionally some-


MORE FRIENDS.
MORE FIENDS.
MORE ALLIES.
MORE ADVERSARIES.
THE ISLAND OF KESMAI
IS WAITING FOR YOU.
Finally, a role-playing game big enough for your imagination. The Island of Kesmai™ Up to 100 people can play at once, battling their way through 62,000 hexes of scalding deserts, towering cliff-top cities, clammy underground catacombs, and 3,250 truly disgusting computer-generated creatures.
No matter how many friends you make, or how many villains you dispatch, you'll never, ever get enough.
And The Island of Kesmai is only one of the exciting multi-player games you can play on CompuServe. We also offer the treacherous British Legends,™ as well as many others. All you need to play is a personal computer, a modem, and a CompuServe membership. To join, or for more information, call 800 848-8199.
And take a trip to the Islands that's anything but relaxing.
CompuServe®

An advertisement for *Islands of Kesmai* on Compuserve

thing new. While the game designers were making their mistakes, they were also learning. The Internet hadn't entered the equation on anything other than the MUD level at this point; all of the other online games were on proprietary servers.

GEnie and other new services began to overtake CompuServe as the premier online gaming service, partially because of mistakes made by the executives of CompuServe. While CompuServe was able to boast a massive customer base at first, it was mainly because in the beginning the company had been actively acquiring new games and paying attention to the market—plus it was the only service around. Between 1988 and 1997, when it was bought out by AOL, CompuServe acquired only one new game, a flop titled *Sniper!* At the same time, it had become overconfident, allowing customer service and company initiative to fall by the wayside.

The new services, GEnie, Prodigy, and QuantumLink, bought up online games as though they were going out of style. Many of the role-playing games were text-based, but the industry was slowly moving over to a graphical system. One of the biggest leaps came in 1988, when Mulligan, at the time working for Quantum Computer Services, recommended licensing *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* as a graphical online role-playing game. The result was *Neverwinter Nights*, an MMORPG based on the SSI (Strategic Simulations Inc.) *Gold Box* game engine and programmed by Cathryn Mataga. Its launch on the newly renamed America Online around 1990 marked the end of the acquisitions period of AOL for several years; of the massively multiplayer games under development by the company at the

time, the only game to launch after *Neverwinter Nights* was *Hangman*.

The industry had taken off like a rocket. With home computers becoming a fixture for North American families, thousands of people were learning what online games could do. As the 1990s dawned, the gaming world looked bright. In 1991, computer game juggernaut Sierra Online launched the Sierra Network. At first, it was a small-scale online service with some family-oriented board and card games. This didn't do as well as had been hoped, and the service was relaunched in 1992 with a number of more conventional games, such as *Red Baron* and the massively multiplayer dungeon romp *The Shadows of Yserbius*.

thieves, or so my father told me.
You encounter an Orc Ranger.
King Cleowyn had a special lockpick which opened a set of doors in the Vestibule, leading to his Palace. He was the king of thieves, or so my father told me.
You encounter 2 Snakes.
A Battle Begins!
50
Choose Your Action
VIVENDI UNIVERSAL

The Shadows of Yserbius

What turned out to be even more important was an event that was little more than a footnote during beta testing. Ken Williams, the president of Sierra, sent a beta copy of the Sierra Network to Richard Garriott, who had created the *Ultima* series for Origin. Garriott commented that he would like to get an *Ultima* game online on that service.

Around the same time, GEnie had a similar idea. The company contacted Origin Systems and began negotiating to develop a massively multiplayer version of *Ultima*, with the working title of *Multima*. As negotiations with GEnie drew out, Origin began to test the waters with other companies, finally closing up negotiations with GEnie in favor of a possible deal with AOL in 1991. This fell through, however, and it remained on the back burner at Origin.

As negotiations were taking place, GEnie decided to attempt a new billing method: it moved a quarter of its services to a low monthly fee. Although this method had been done before, it was one of the first times a monthly fee was attempted with a large online provider. Naturally, chaos ensued. So many people tried to log in on the first day of the new billing that the servers crashed. However, it set a precedent and began the transformation of online games away from an hourly rate to a flat fee.

As 1992 came to a close, the online market was booming. Between three to ten million homes now had modem access, and hundreds of thousands of people were using online services. Sixteen massively multiplayer games dotted the landscape, with at least another eight in development. However, two things were about to happen that would

change everything, and the MMORPG would literally reinvent itself.

A new generation of designers was coming into its own, and the Internet was about to enter the picture.

THE INTERNET REVOLUTION

Considering the sheer size of the massively multiplayer online game community, which already represented an elite cadre of developers, the last thing that most people would expect was for game companies to reinvent the wheel.

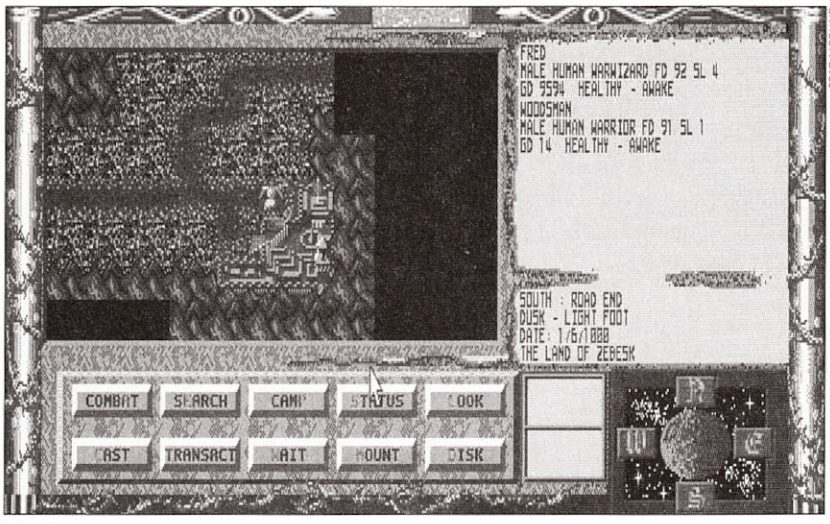
Yet, it seems that not only did the computer game industry reinvent the wheel, it also went back even further to rediscover fire and how to make sharp pointy sticks for hunting.

By 1993, the war for the market share between IBM and Apple was all but settled. It wasn't that the Macintosh computers were of inferior quality (at this point in time, quite the reverse was true), but more that with IBM allowing most companies to make clones, far more IBM-compatible computers were on the market, for much cheaper prices. With the IBM standard the most popular on the market, it's no surprise that computer game developers began making games mainly for the Personal Computer, or PC.

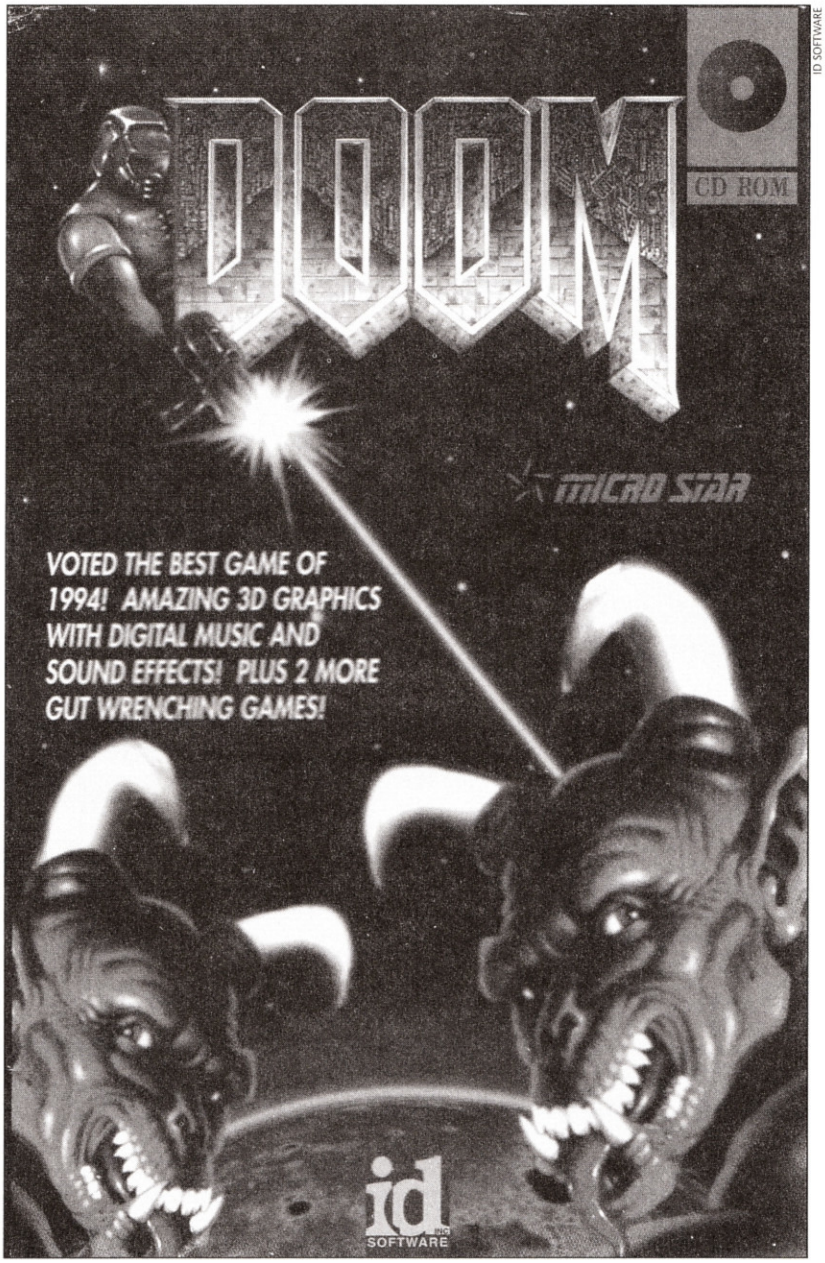
Something else had happened, though. A generation had now passed between the explosion of early games in the 1970s and the introduction of the Internet to the general public in 1993. A new cadre of young game developers were testing their programming wings, usually at the grassroots level using the shareware market. These were people who hadn't necessarily been exposed to the multiplayer games of the late '70s and early '80s; many of them were introduced to computer games with offerings like *King's Quest* or the text-only *Zork*.

It was this younger generation of developers who were discovering the Internet for the first time in 1993 and who were reinventing the computer game in their own image. Among this generation were Brad McQuaid and Steve Clover, who founded a small company named MicroGenesis in 1989. They released their first game, *WarWizard*, as shareware in 1993. Essentially a graphical update of the computer role-playing game genre already released, albeit with an emphasis on playability, *WarWizard* was no blockbuster, but it did well enough that McQuaid and Clover began working on a sequel, *WarWizard 2*. *WarWizard 2* was released in 1995 as a demo, and although nobody realized it at the time, it would help change the industry forever.

By the beginning of 1993, the Internet had grown to link numerous academic institutions and was known as DARPA-Net. The seeds of the Internet as we now know it were



WarWizard


DOOM
CD ROM
micro star
VOTED THE BEST GAME OF 1994! AMAZING 3D GRAPHICS WITH DIGITAL MUSIC AND SOUND EFFECTS! PLUS 2 MORE GUT WRENCHING GAMES!
id SOFTWARE
ID SOFTWARE

Box art for *DOOM*

there; the World Wide Web existed, but only as text (this would change with the release of Mosaic later in the year). E-mail and newsgroups had been around for more than a decade. Numerous MUDs littered the network, usually running on university servers.

It would be nice to say that when the Internet was made available to the general public, there was an immediate surge of use, causing an instant revolution. That would be a wild fantasy, though. Actually, for the first few months, the Internet was all but ignored. The big online services, such as Prodigy and AOL, took virtually no note of it, considering it a curiosity at best.

The small companies began the Internet revolution—little businesses that had been running BBSs, usually with fewer than 16 lines. They began to connect to the network, becoming the first Internet Service Providers, or ISPs. By the end of the year, these little companies were doing well enough on a grassroots level that the media began to pay attention and talk about it, causing the larger online services to sit up and take note.

In the world of massively multiplayer games, 1993 passed without anybody noticing the Internet. The online services were doing well enough without it. The year was most notable for a price war that started when Prodigy went back to an hourly rate of $3 per hour, causing AOL and GEnie to follow suit and CompuServe to ignore it. (This was one of its big mistakes that would lead

to it being purchased by AOL.) A couple of new massively multiplayer games were released on GEnie and the ImagiNation Network (the Sierra Network, renamed), but otherwise not a great deal happened.

Well, actually, one thing happened. A little shareware game was released on December 10 by one of those companies created by the new generation of game developers. It was titled *DOOM*.

DOOM was the first first-person shooter to take advantage of the PC's communications technology. It was a graphically intensive game, with texture mapping and a small-scale multiplayer mode; two people could connect over modems and blow each other to smithereens, or four players could do the same over a local area network. It amazed the industry at the time, winning just about every award to be had.

If 1993 was the year when the seeds of the reinvention of the computer game industry took root, 1994 was the year that they blossomed. Once again, however, the massively multiplayer games were not involved. Instead, the new generation began with regular multiplayer games. Blizzard released *Warcraft*, a fantasy real-time strategy (RTS) game that allowed both modem and network play. While the RTS had actually been brought to the PC platform by *Dune 2* a bit earlier, *Warcraft* was the game that popularized the genre. Most of the industry, however, had its eyes on id Software, the developers of *DOOM*. The multiplayer aspect had always been far more popular than the single-player game (indeed, in retrospect, *DOOM* and its sequel were pretty much plotless), and as *DOOM II* was released, id started hearing suggestion after suggestion that the game should be made Internet-capable.

The Internet was growing. Part of this was because of a new development of *Mosaic*, known as *Netscape Navigator*, making it easier for people to use the Internet.

The big media companies began to realize that there just might be money in online games after all. 1994 turned into a year of acquisitions. The ImagiNation Network (also known as INN) was sold to AT&T, and News Corp. bought out Kesmai.

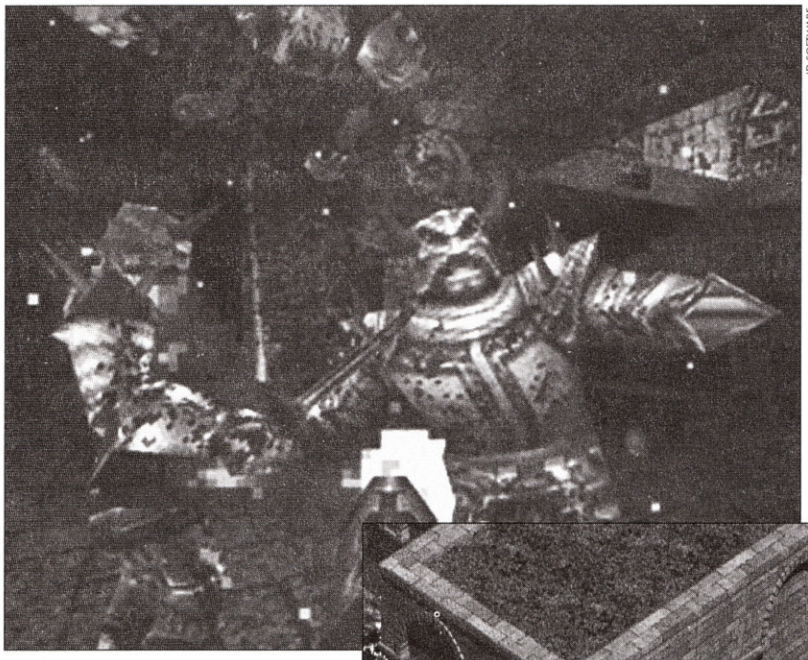
By the end of 1994, however, the big online providers had taken note. The Internet was now available on AOL, CompuServe, and Prodigy.

The industry was still reinventing itself in 1995. With the Internet now available on the major online providers, the number of users skyrocketed. This ended up having a couple of amusing side-effects, particularly with AOL. Most AOL users had never used newsgroups before and discovered them with glee. Unfortunately, they didn't know the posting protocols, and they quickly managed to violate every single one of them. This gave users of the service a bad reputation that is still around today.

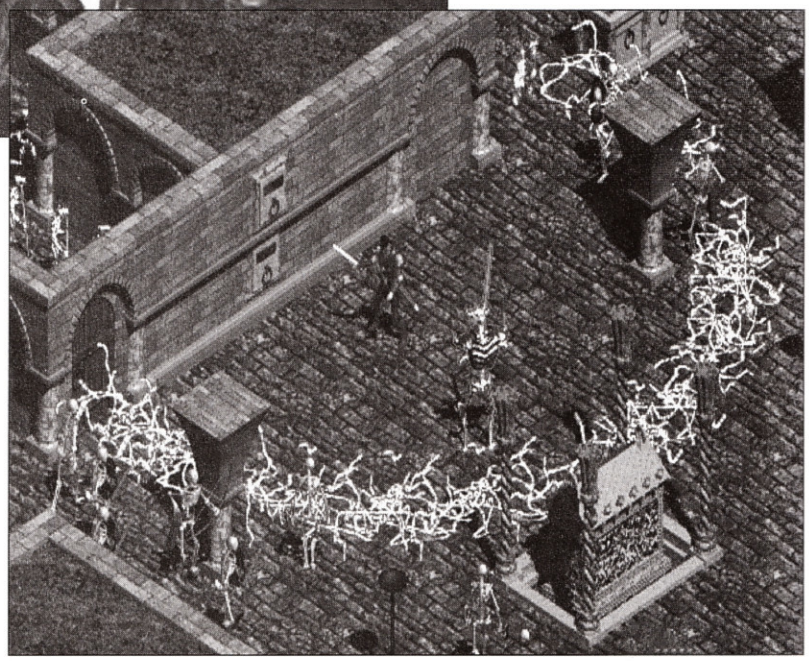
The massively multiplayer games were still following the conventional mode. A few new releases were notable, such as the MMORPG *Gemstone III* on AOL, but for the most part, they didn't use the Internet at all. But two changes were on the horizon.

The first was from id Software. Following the success of *DOOM II*, and the numerous requests for Internet play, id decided to make its next game, *Quake*, fully Internet-capable. At the same time, it was a true 3D engine. (*DOOM* had actually been only partially 3D; all of the creatures had been two-dimensional sprites.) The beta test was released in what turned out to be, as Mulligan wrote, "building demand for a product into a homicidal frenzy."

The Internet was now firmly fixed in the minds of the gaming public, and the new generation of developers, as an ideal gaming platform. People could play games with each other around the world, unfettered by geography. Indeed, after 1995, most



Quake



Diablo

strategy or action games were considered to be incomplete unless they supported network and Internet play.

The second thing that would change the industry happened at Origin. Garriott's idea for an online game based on *Ultima* was dusted off. Origin decided that it would produce the game and make it an MMORPG designed for, and played on, the Internet. While one or two old hands were still working on the game, most of the developers were part of the new Internet generation.

Oddly enough, as *Ultima Online* began to take shape at Origin, it was Blizzard Entertainment that actually took the next step. In 1996, Blizzard released *Diablo*, a simple role-playing action game where a player could choose one of three character classes, venture down into a dungeon, and kill things.

At first glance, *Diablo* may not seem terribly worthy of note, considering that even as it was released, at least two Internet MMORPGs were in development. However, *Diablo* had a well-designed multiplayer mode, allowing up to four players to venture into the dungeon together. Added to this was free access to an Internet gaming server named Battle.net, where players could connect, create, and join games from anywhere around the world.

Diablo was a wild success. Not only did it reinvigorate the role-playing genre, which had suffered a distinct decline, but it also demonstrated, beyond all possible doubt,

Ultima Online

that people would want to play a multiplayer RPG over the Internet. Furthermore, its success also made players comfortable with the idea of Internet role-playing, paving the way for the new wave of MMORPGs to come.

1996 was a year of transition. An early version of *Ultima Online* was demonstrated in May at the E3 conference, creating mild interest. *Neverwinter Nights*, one of the most successful of the old guard MMORPGs, was shut down on AOL; many more of the older massively multiplayer games would follow as the old online gaming services became Internet servers.

AOL also took a step that would change the industry—like GEnie before it, it moved to a flat rate for its services in December; this was so popular that it flooded the servers, but it also meant the company suffered a substantial loss in revenue. However, with a major online provider offering Internet access this way, the model was now set in stone; most ISPs would follow suit.

The Internet MMORPG seemed to be an idea whose time had come. Between 1995 and 1997, at least four Internet MMORPGs went into development or were released. The first one off the mark was *Ultima Online* in North America, followed closely by *Lineage* in Asia.

Ultima Online would prove to be a learning experience to the new generation of game designers, who had been reinventing the industry since the early 1990s. Some of the lessons were learned more slowly than others; as late as *World War II Online*'s release in 2001, some Internet massively multiplayer games were still launching too early and without enough servers to handle the player population.

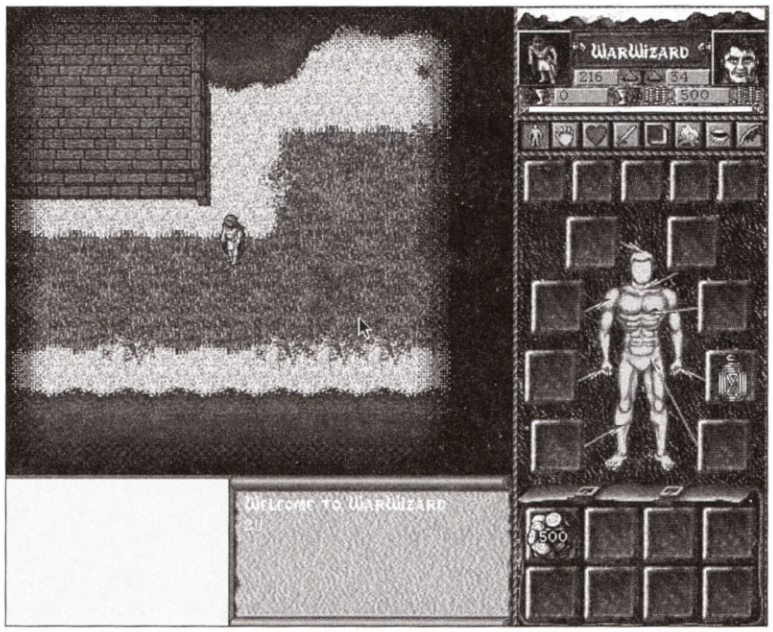
Ultima Online: Rough Waters

When Ultima Online was launched in 1997, the MMORPG was 12 years old. It stood to reason that Origin would have learned from the growing pains of the medium in the 1980s, and that players would have a smooth and rich gaming experience. And at first, it looked like it would go smoothly, as more than 50,000 players signed up within the first three months.

Instead, the launch was a disaster. Too few servers were in place to handle the load, resulting in some of the worst lag ever seen on the Internet. The software was filled with bugs, and the gameplay was unbalanced. At the beginning, there were so many more players than monsters that dungeons were filled with players camping out beside monster spawn points, just waiting for the odd creature to pop up so they could kill it. Industry insiders were left shaking their heads, wondering why Origin hadn't consulted more of the veteran MMORPG designers who had known for years how to avoid such a mess. After a few months, the game managed to get sorted out and even became a smashing success, but not before a class action lawsuit was brought against Origin in 1998 for not providing the services advertised.

However, as Origin was working on *Ultima Online* in 1996, Sony decided to enter the Internet massively multiplayer market. John Smedley of Sony's 989 Studios began recruiting designers and programmers for what would become the most successful North American MMORPG ever to hit the market. Impressed by a demo for *WarWizard 2*, his first move was to recruit Brad McQuaid and Steve Clover to develop this new game.

The game would be titled *EverQuest*.



Warwizard 2

THE ROAD TO EVERQUEST

CHAPTER 3

"IT'S A DANGEROUS BUSINESS, FRODO, GOING OUT OF YOUR DOOR," HE USED TO SAY. "YOU STEP INTO THE ROAD, AND IF YOU DON'T KEEP YOUR FEET, THERE IS NO KNOWING WHERE YOU MIGHT BE SWEPT OFF TO."

—J.R.R. TOLKIEN, THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING

It would be wonderful to be able to say that *EverQuest* was a flash of brilliance, and that when John Smedley began recruiting developers in 1996 he knew exactly what he wanted to do. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

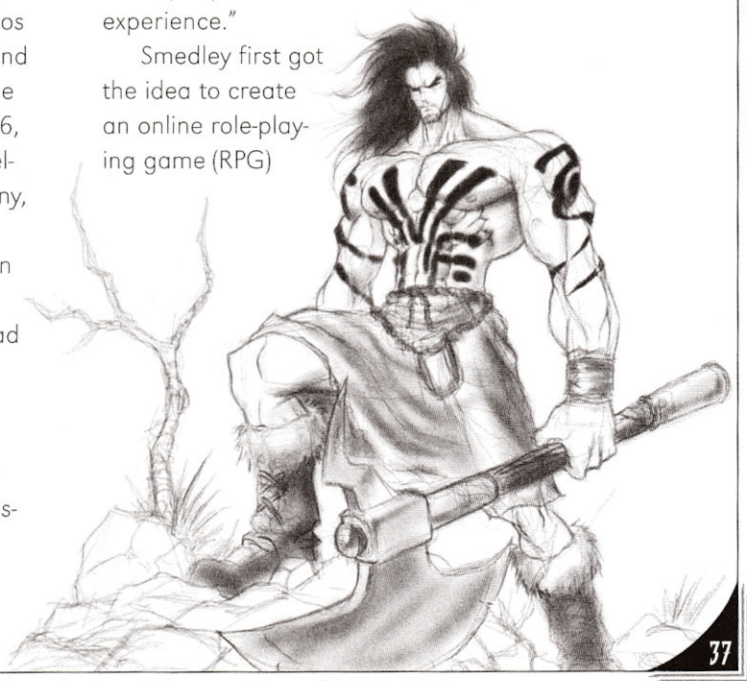
Smedley, the head of Sony Interactive Studios (which changed its name first to 989 Studios and then spun off into Verant in 1999) knew that he wanted to create an online game. Prior to 1996, he had been developing titles for Sony, including a tank warfare simulation for the PC, titled *Tanarus*, which had a 3D engine. He had also been a great fan of *Dungeons & Dragons* and the older, massively multiplayer and "pay-by-the-hour" games, such as Simultronic's *Cyberstrike*.

CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY, VANN TRAN

John Smedley

"The online industry was what I personally wanted to do, mostly because I was heavily into *Cyberstrike*," Smedley recalled. "I was spending so much of my free time in that game, I figured other people would want to have the same experience."

Smedley first got the idea to create an online role-playing game (RPG)



around December 1995. He approached Rich Robinson, his boss at the time, with a game proposal that included a cost breakdown, only to be summarily rejected two minutes into his pitch. Soon afterward, Robinson left Sony, and Smedley pitched the idea to his new boss, Kelly Flock.

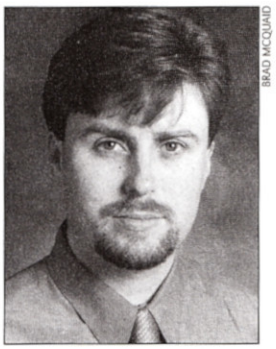
"I literally took the exact same pitch to him," Smedley said, "and he said 'Yes' and gave me the okay to fund a few programmers and an artist, and get a start on this."

When Smedley began recruiting a development team in 1996, he had three goals he wanted to achieve with his new online game: It had to be Internet-based, it had to accommodate hundreds of people online at once, and it had to use a 3D engine. But to make it happen, first he needed people.

BUILDING THE TEAM

Smedley's first task was to begin building the development team. Impressed by a demo of *WarWizard 2*, he investigated, and then in March 1996 he hired the two people behind the game: Brad McQuaid and Steve Clover.

"I was at home one night looking for exactly what I ended up getting, which was shareware programmers," Smedley said. "At that time, a lot of the people in shareware were very passionate about what they did, and I had to keep the budget low, so the price was right. I saw *WarWizard 2*, and I contacted Brad, and through him, Steve."


BRAD MCQUAID

Brad McQuaid

For 989 Studios, it was *terra incognita*. They had never put together a massively multiplayer game before; they were part of the generation of developers reinventing the industry in their own image. For the first few months, the team consisted of only McQuaid and Clover (who came up with the name *EverQuest* at the three-month mark), with McQuaid as the lead programmer, who was quickly promoted to producer.

"Nobody really knew what we were getting into," McQuaid recalled. "So we grew the team slowly but surely, as needs arose and as new budgets were approved."

Much of the team reflected the industry at the time. They were young, fresh talents, a few of whom (Bill Trost, Kevin Burns, and Milo Cooper, all of whom started out as artists) had worked on *WarWizard* and *WarWizard 2*. At the same time, McQuaid and Clover looked back to their days playing on free MUDs (multiuser dungeons), and brought MUD programmers such as Geoff Zatkin, who had worked in LPMUDs, and Roger Uzun, who had begun playing games back in the

BRAD MCQUAID

Steve Clover and Brad McQuaid

days of *Avatar*. By the end of the year, the team had around ten members, all of whom were working together in a small single-room office space. While the team worked together fairly smoothly, some conflicts occurred, partially due to the small working space.

"I remember early on I could overhear Brad [McQuaid], who is one of the ultimate political buffs on the planet—he will debate anything to its bitter end," chuckled Smedley. "I can remember hearing people complaining, 'Oh God, here goes Brad again with this,' or one of the artists complaining about one of the other artists. I would call them pretty minor—on the grand scheme of things, the personal problems we had on this project I wish we had on others."

The team grew slowly through the development phase to 25 members, who were divided into several departments, in the process outgrowing the office space they had occupied for a year and a half. At the top was McQuaid, leading the production team, and who was responsible for management, public relations, and setting the overall artistic, design, and engineering goals. Trost was put in charge of designing and implementing the world mythos, content creation, and background. In the programming team, Clover led the group and spearheaded the client programming, Uzun handled the server and game systems, and John Buckley would eventually be put in charge of upgrading the graphics. The artists, led by Rosie Cosgrove, would create the nitty-gritty of the visual look of the game, working with 3D tools to create polygonal models or Photoshop to design textures. In the design team, the world builders used an in-house level editor built by Uzun to create the world, designing cities and dungeons. They worked hand-in-hand with the populators, who used a database front-end created by Ryan Palacio to create monsters, treasure, lore, quests, items, and non-player characters (NPCs), and to make certain that these characters could interact with their environment in a sensible way.

Although most of the design team was specialized, several people worked concurrently on both world design and populating. Almost all of the implementation was carried out by Uzun and Clover, while the outdoor zones were built by Scott McDaniel using 3DStudio MAX, under the direction of the art department and with input from the rest of the design team. Regardless of the structure, the gameplay decisions were usually made with the input of more than one group, such as the programmers and populators, with McQuaid having the final say.

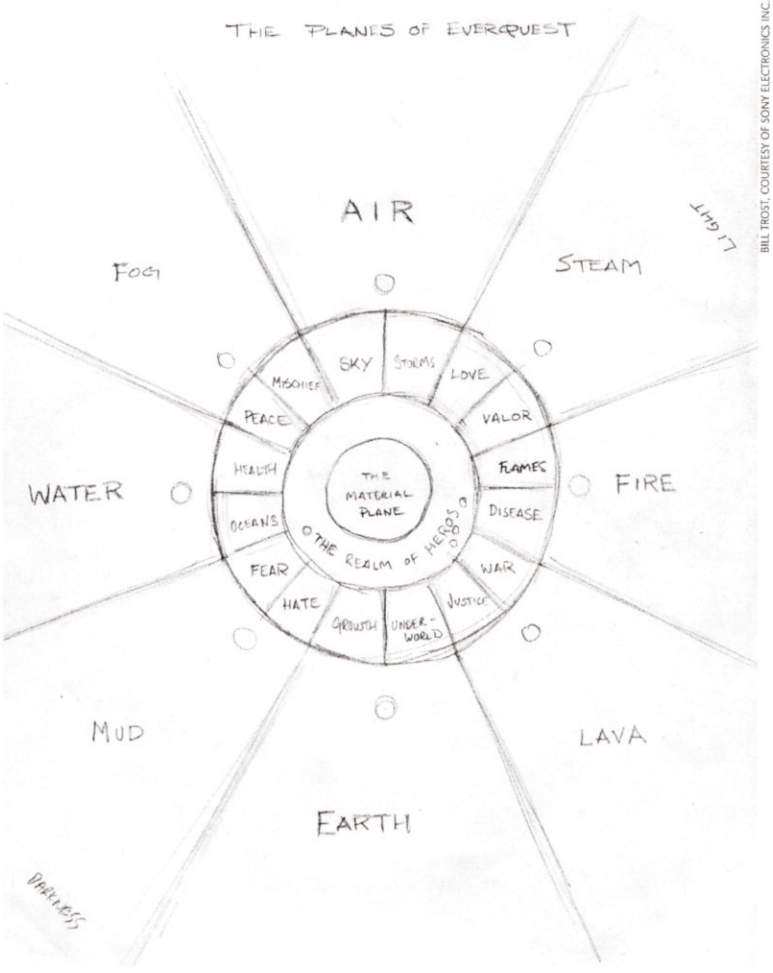
CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY, VANN TRAN

Roger Uzun

For the growing *EverQuest* team, the development cycle would be a journey into new places, and not always an easy one. Unlike the old guard who had worked on games such as

Islands of Kesmai and *Neverwinter Nights*, while members of the *EverQuest* team had played massively multiplayer games, they had never *created* one, and they had a great deal of learning to do. The quality and dedication of the team is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that through the entire development cycle for the original game, they lost only a single member.

"There are always issues when a huge, collaborative project is developed, especially one in which we were all very much learning as we went along," McQuaid said. "There was certainly pressure to complete the game, and we had a lot of target ship dates that went on by as both the team and management grew to understand the magnitude of what we were doing. Pressure, long hours, and not always knowing how much work was really ahead of us certainly took its toll; but then, in hindsight, I'm sure everybody feels it was well worth it."



An early drawing of the planes of *EverQuest*

FLESHING OUT THE IDEA

When McQuaid and Clover were hired in 1996, they were in the position of building an entire massively multiplayer game from scratch. Sony Interactive Studios/989 had licensed the 3D game engine from *Tanarus* and developed some network code, but otherwise (with the exception of Smedley's requirement that the game be massively multiplayer and on the Internet), *EverQuest* was a blank slate.

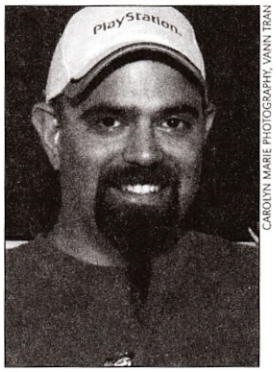
Creating the initial design was up to McQuaid and Clover. They began by looking back to MUDs for their inspiration, particularly *DikuMUD*. Over two months, they drew up an 80-page document detailing the *EverQuest* world, with examples of gameplay, the interface, and the game components. As they did this, the pair learned to use the *Tanarus* engine and its development tools, which would soon be used to create the indoor zones.

"We really made the game we wanted to make," McQuaid recalled, "based on tried-and-true MUD principles, believing that what made those niche text games so compelling could truly be commercially viable when coupled with a 3D virtual world and real marketing."

The original document was extremely close to

the finished game, enough so that Smedley once remarked that he had never seen a finished game come so close to the original design, although some variations were implemented later. One or two early ideas had to be scrapped due to sheer logistics, such as Smedley's idea of having the entire game being "zoneless." The original plan of having five continents with 40 to 50 zones (bite-sized areas in which the players could explore) in total became three continents with 80 zones in release, as more densely zoned regions were found to be better for the gameplay. The remaining two continents, one of which had already been fully detailed by Kevin McPherson, would be released in expansions.

The only system that took a complete overhaul from the original design document was the alignment system, which governed morality and the results of a player's actions in the game. The original plan was to have a character's alignment based on a traditional MUD system, using a number from -1000 to 1000. At -1000, a character would be utterly evil, while a character at the other end of the scale represented saintly goodness. A 0 alignment would represent complete neutrality.



CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY, VANN TRAN

Bill Trost

When Trost, who had been an artist on *WarWizard 2*, was brought on board, he took over detailing the world of Norrath and its history. He found the planned alignment system too simplistic, and with the help of Uzun devised the more elaborate "faction" system, where a player's action would affect groups of NPCs, or *factions* nearby, but not necessarily factions from zones that were farther away.

The changing technology and two-year development cycle forced a change in the software and hardware for *EverQuest*. Back in 1996 when development began, 3D rendering technology was in its infancy. As a result, the original plan was to have all the rendering done by the software alone. The Voodoo 1 chip changed all that, including the *EverQuest* team's design philosophy. Smedley decided to take advantage of the new technology, and after much discussion, the team decided that the game would support the new hardware; the development team restructured the game to be one of the first hardware-only rendered games in the industry. "At a certain point, the engine had to go one way or another," Uzun

EverQuest concept art—a halfling

CREATING FACTIONS

Uzun "was playing Daggerfall at the time," Trost said, "and it had a more elaborate way of keeping track of the groups within the game that you swore allegiance to and did quests for, and that was more in line with the type of game that I, coming from a D&D pen-and-paper background, wanted to play. So, between Roger and I, we worked out how we would get the more meaningful relationships between NPCs and player characters that we wanted, and it just evolved over time into the faction system."

"In a large online world, it doesn't make much sense to have a good versus evil system," added Uzun. "Many evil factions just don't have contact with each other."

recalled. "It would have hamstrung our hardware acceleration and rendering if we had kept the software rendering elements in there."

McQuaid mused, "In retrospect, I'm glad John pushed this on us. I'm now a firm believer that 'minimum requirements' are really not as key as some people may think—if you make a great game, people will buy the hardware to play it. And when it comes to an online RPG, where people are going to play for months, even years, you need as immersive an environment as possible."

Another result of the new technology was that the rendering of the character models had to be kept updated throughout development. McQuaid hired Buckley, who had worked on the *Pyrotechnics* engine from *Tanarus*, to redo the character engine and the game graphics in general, beginning a gradual process of constantly updating the game engine that would last throughout the development cycle. It proved to be the right decision, as it kept the game reasonably close to the cutting edge. Buckley also wrote many of the development tools that would be used to create and populate the game zones.

In June 1997, enough of the game had been finished to present it at the E3 convention in Atlanta. It was far from a completed version—the demo covered the city of Qeynos, the Qeynos Hills, and Blackburrow. Even so, the reaction was positive. Quite a few people were excited that 989 Studios was working on a traditional fantasy game, and a 3D-based one at that. The focus on player versus environment also intrigued the audience, as well as the optional player versus player mode the demo sported.

The response at E3 was nothing compared to the Computer Game Developer's Conference (CGDC) the following April. At this point, the game was almost ready to go into preliminary beta testing; about a third of the world was complete, allowing 989 to set up a small network of computers connected to the company's server in San Diego. McQuaid and the other 989 Studios people who were at the conference weren't quite sure what to expect.

The booth was swamped. The gamers would sit down, play for hours, and refuse to relinquish the computer afterward. Some would even log off and hop from one computer to another, hoping that the people running the booth wouldn't notice.

If nothing else, the crowd's reaction at the conference was an eye opener that telegraphed the tremendous success the game would have later. "I think it was then that we looked at each

other and said to ourselves, 'Wow, we really have something here,'" McQuaid said.

The situation in June 1998 had the game ready for the most basic beta testing. Around a third of the game world had been completed, but the multiplayer code was in place and ready to go. It was simply a matter of making certain that everything worked and that the company was ready.

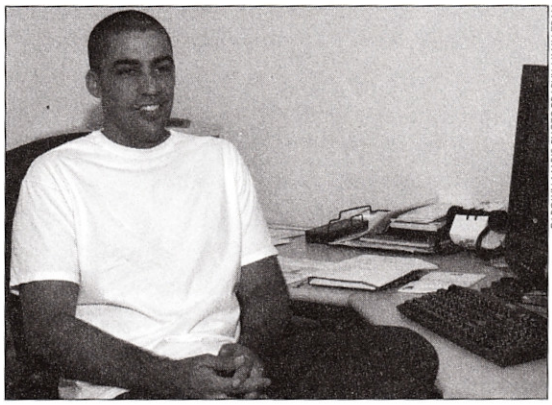
The biggest immediate concerns were how well the servers would hold up and whether the network code could handle the load. "*Tanarus*, from which our code descended, had hundreds of concurrent users, not thousands," McQuaid said. "Thankfully, with minor tweaks and adjustments and good load balancing and profiling, programmers like Vince Harron did a fantastic job."

The initial beta test took place between friends and family, and it became known as "Phase 0.5." Although the game was ready for testing, it wasn't quite ready for the public—two thirds of the zones still needed to be populated and finished, and 989 wanted to start small and build. Phase 0.5 quickly became Beta 1, a test involving about 50 people.

For the *EverQuest* team, it was the first of several trials by fire. Despite the demonstration at the CGDC a couple of months earlier, the game hadn't been played by more than 40 people at a time. The bugs cropped up by the hundreds, forcing McQuaid and his team to scramble to correct each one as it occurred. The range was remarkable. Some bugs were simple fixes, while others could crash the server entirely. The development team quickly found that the key to surviving was ensuring that the bugs were dealt with as quickly as possible. For the team members, this meant that they had to dedicate some long hours, including weekends, to the project. It was the beginning of a crunch time that would last 16 months.

"The standard day was about nine in the morning to midnight, six or seven days a week," recalled Andy Sites, who joined the team about a year before the game was released.

The second phase of the beta testing, known as Beta 2, involved several hundred people. As it took place and the server took on a heavier load, the development team continued to flesh out the world, completing zones and adding in quests.



CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY, VANN TRAN

Andy Sites

In the middle of autumn 1998, even as great change loomed over the development team, *EverQuest* was ready for a public beta test.

GROWING PAINS

While the beta testing was going well in late 1998, 989 Studios was beginning to go through a crisis. The Sony Playstation 2 was on the horizon, and the small company had a decision to make: it could continue to develop PC games, or it could focus solely on the console market. The company decided on the latter.

"Kelly Flock had decided that the PC side of things was too risky and wasn't a good fit with the Playstation and Playstation 2 setup that the company was working on at the time," Smedley said. "He was planning on laying off everybody except the *EverQuest* team, which he wanted to keep on until the game launched, and see how it did. I asked him if I could approach another division of Sony, Sony Online, and Brad McQuaid, Russell Shanks, and myself formed Verant."

Smedley turned to McQuaid, who accepted an offer to be a co-founder of the new company. With three months remaining on the beta test and the game almost complete, Verant

BRAD MCQUAID

One of Verant Interactive's posters

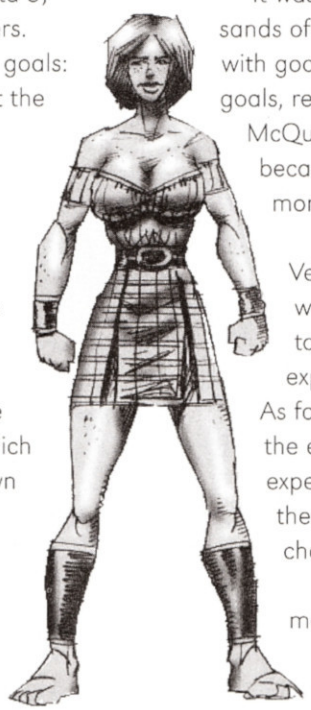
Interactive was founded in January 1999, with Smedley at the helm and McQuaid serving as vice president.

The time had also come for a beta test that would involve thousands of players and fill the entire server to capacity. Known as Beta 3, this testing phase involved 5000 players. This part of the process had two main goals: The team needed to make certain that the server would handle the load, and the high-end game was virtually untested. The team also had to be certain that the gameplay would be balanced through the entire game.

The highest level zones were made available to the players, and gamers found themselves wandering around Lower Guk and Solusek B. At the same time, the success of *Ultima Online*, which had finally managed to get past its own growing pains, inspired the team.

"It gave us confidence that *EverQuest* could also be very successful," McQuaid recalled. "That, and when it came to the fact that we were using a 3D engine as well as more focus on player versus environment instead of player against player, fostering interdependence, community building, and socialization, we really felt we had an advantage."

With the third phase of testing a success, the time had come for the servers' ultimate test. Beta 4, a massive test involving 25,000 people spread over at least five servers, began at the end of January 1999. As had happened throughout the process, bugs began to appear. For the first time, programming bugs weren't the only things the developers had to deal with, for hacking and duping occurred as well. The team was taken aback, as they hadn't expected the cheating that occurred.



"It was simply amazing how having thousands of people bang on your code, some with good intentions and some with other goals, revealed problems and issues," McQuaid said. "But it was all good, because it made the game that much more stable at launch."

As February 1999 came to a close, Verant was convinced that the game was ready. The servers had managed to handle 25,000 people and were expected to be able to handle far more. As far as the design team was concerned, the entire testing phase was a learning experience, while other realities, such as the importance of game balance and challenge, were reinforced.

"We made a very strong commitment to creating a balanced and fun environment," McQuaid said, "and

Cooking Levels

"We called it 'voodoo,' because there were certain procedures we could go through within the level building tool," said Trost, "and if you highlighted certain things and exported it, it would go through fine. If you forgot to highlight those things, which logically shouldn't mean anything, after the thing had 'cooked' for 12, 15, 36, 48 hours, you'd find out that it wasn't going to finish."

Sites added, "The December before we launched we actually had the 144 machines that we were going to be using as the server farms running and exporting all the zones. We had it running for the entire Christmas vacation, and we had to come in and check them every day. We had export times that would range from one day to four weeks."

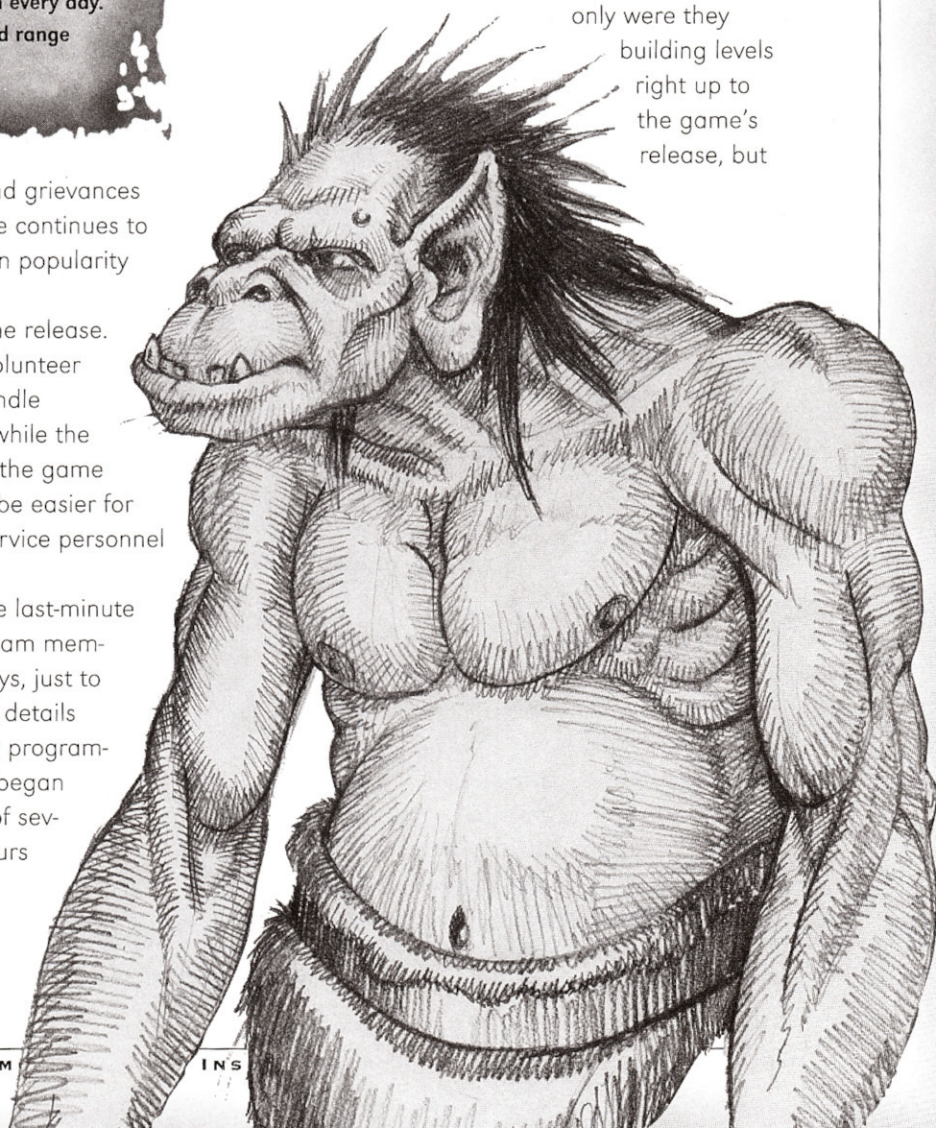
while there were always issues and grievances amongst the player base, as there continues to be, the game continued to grow in popularity and commercial success."

The company geared up for the release. Paid Game Masters (GMs) and volunteer Game Guides were trained to handle whatever problems might occur, while the customer service interface inside the game was streamlined so that it would be easier for both the players and customer service personnel to deal with petitions.

For the development team, the last-minute crunch was a massive one. The team members had to put in even longer days, just to make certain that the last-minute details were complete. Minor bugs in the programming and level-building software began to appear, forcing the rendering of several levels, which already took hours with the entire Verant network working on it, to be repeated as the system crashed repeatedly.

One of the problems that had caused this chaos was that the team hadn't really understood the importance of the development tools they were using. The level building tool was based on a client-server model, with the server "cooking" the level after the designer had built and exported it. But since the model had been put together almost as an afterthought, it barely worked, and the zone building process could take hours. Some zones even had to be split up, because the export time took too long. While the first level had been built on a Pentium 90, the new levels were being cooked on dual 200 MHz processors with half a gigabyte of RAM, and the export time could still take days.

The level building was a constant process that kept the development team occupied. Not only were they building levels right up to the game's release, but



once *EverQuest* was released, they then had to think about expanding levels and providing new content.

By March 8, 1999, *EverQuest* had become the most anticipated online computer game of the year. It broke several industry records for pre-release sales, and the public waited with bated breath to see whether the Verant team could produce everything it promised.

It was time for the game to meet its public.

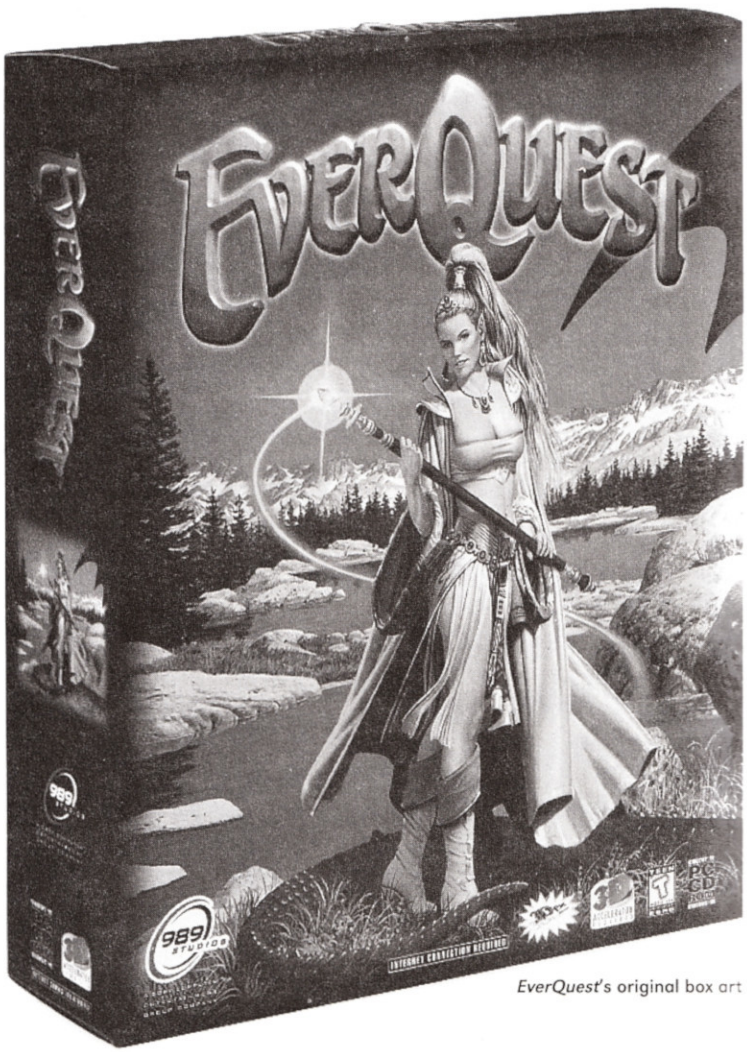
MEETING THE PUBLIC

While massively multiplayer games had been around for more than 15 years when *EverQuest* was released, the Internet was something relatively new. *Ultima Online* and *Lineage* had both broken new ground by basing their games on the Internet, rather than a proprietary server, but the industry itself didn't really understand what would be necessary for a truly successful MMORPG.

When *EverQuest* was released on March 16, 1999, it gained more than 10,000 subscribers on its first day. As far as sales went, the game was an unqualified success. The players kept coming in, and virtually nobody left. Within six months, *EverQuest* had sold more than 225,000 units and had a regular player base that exceeded 150,000 people.

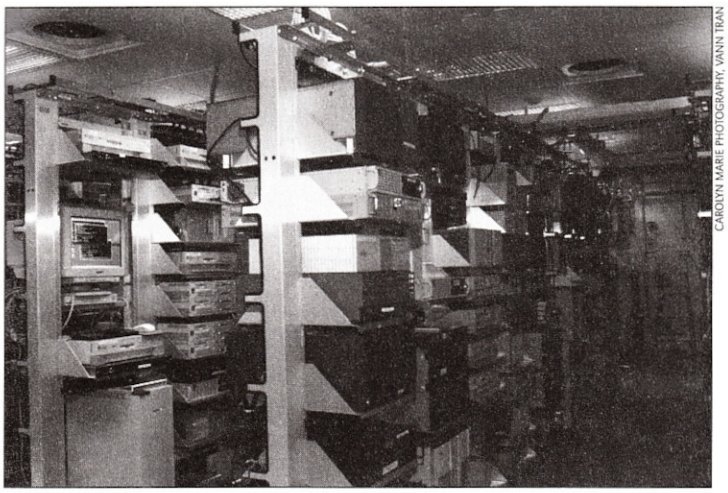
Unfortunately, it didn't matter how ready the Verant team was for the release—problems were bound to ensue. The main problem revolved around bandwidth, an issue that is not terribly well understood by most people. Many see it as an unlimited resource of the Internet, when in truth it is anything but. *Bandwidth* is essentially the capacity of the network to transmit and receive information. At any given time, the bandwidth of the Internet is limited—for that matter, the bandwidth of any given Internet site or resource is limited and dependent on the number and quality of connections. In 1999, most Internet Service Providers (ISPs) understood bandwidth as it applied to web sites, and most were quite ready to handle the user load.

A successful massively multiplayer game, however, was an entirely different matter. Verant knew that its servers could handle the load. As it turned out, however, the Internet itself could not.



EverQuest's original box art

As customers flooded in to join the game, most of the bandwidth calculations that Verant and its ISP had made were rendered invalid. The calculations had originally been based on web site traffic, which came in bursts and used large data packets. *EverQuest*, on the other hand, used a constant stream of tiny data packets. Verant's ISP, and for that matter most of the ISPs in San Diego put together, literally didn't have enough bandwidth to handle the game load, resulting in an Internet blackout for virtually every user in the San Diego area.



CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY, VANN TRAN

One of *EverQuest*'s server rooms

As Verant's ISP rushed to build new bandwidth between Los Angeles and San Diego, Verant found that it ran into another major issue, this time surrounding the technology itself. The routers that the company was using couldn't handle the Internet traffic, even though it was well within the routers' bandwidth.

The problem baffled the engineers of the company that had provided the hardware. In theory, the routers should have worked perfectly—after all, the traffic for the game was well within the bandwidth tolerances of the router. The issue, as with the bandwidth crisis, was the nature of the packets that *EverQuest* used. To keep track of everybody's position inside the game, the software used a constant stream of millions of tiny data packets. The routers, on the other hand, were designed to handle large data packets, and they were overloaded with the unconventional usage. It was a problem the Internet, and the router manufacturer, had never had to deal with before.

For the *EverQuest* team, it was the beginning of three months of hell.

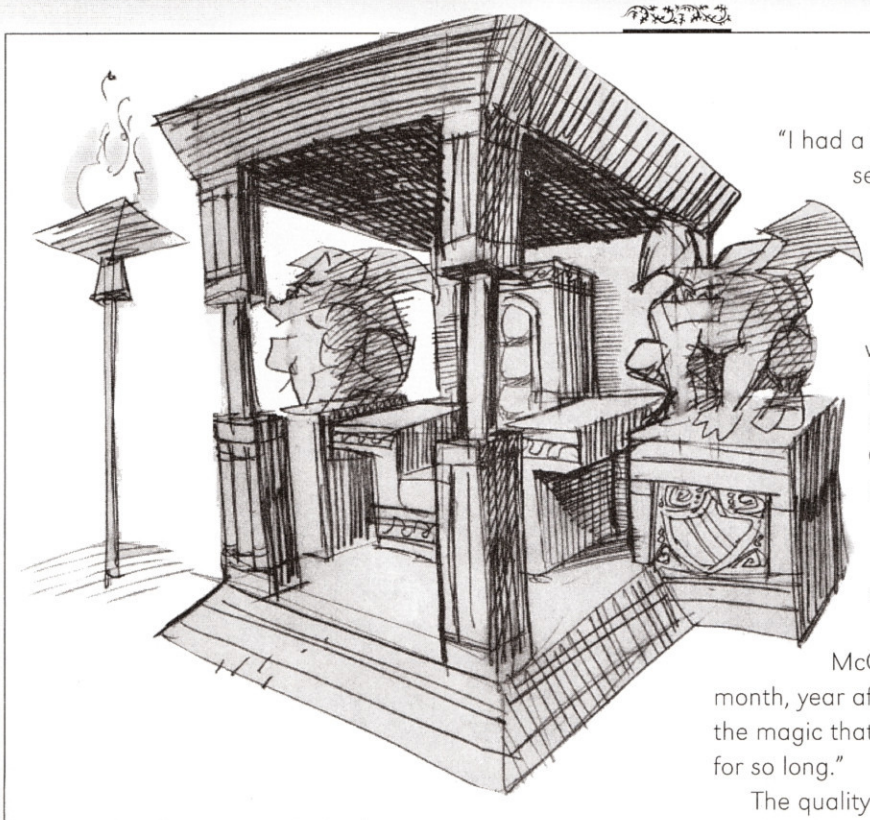
With the launch problems, the team was also watching the servers at every moment. "There'd be somebody sitting in the data center at all times," Trost remembered, "just in case something went down. It was around 15 degrees in there, and there'd be guys with parkas on, sitting there all night."

The fact that the player base stayed through those first two weeks speaks volumes about the quality of the game and the community. However, the launching difficulties had taken their toll on the player community. Players were anxious, frustrated, and wanted answers. While having McQuaid explain the situation on the

Finding Bandwidth

"We were delving into areas truly untested and before then only in the realm of theory," McQuaid recalled. "Finally, we simply threw hardware at the problem, upgrading our equipment well beyond spec, and finally got the problem under control."

Uzun said, "We were trying everything to reduce the amount of bandwidth we needed. I was here every day, weekends, right up until July. It seemed like I was here day and night in June and July."



chat/login server helped, more was necessary.

"In the end, we credited everybody with a month's free access, after which most significant access problems went away," McQuaid said. "And, all the time, the game's servers were chugging along, waiting for players to actually connect to it, and happily providing gameplay when they eventually did."

For the customer service team, it was a baptism by fire. "At least we had the foresight to put together a customer service team," said Uzun. "We were really taken by surprise by the rapid adoption of the game. It was very hectic—they had long, long hours."

Despite the intensity of the first three months, few of the development team left Verant after *EverQuest* was released. While Buckley and two others had decided to move on, the rest of the development team remained intact.

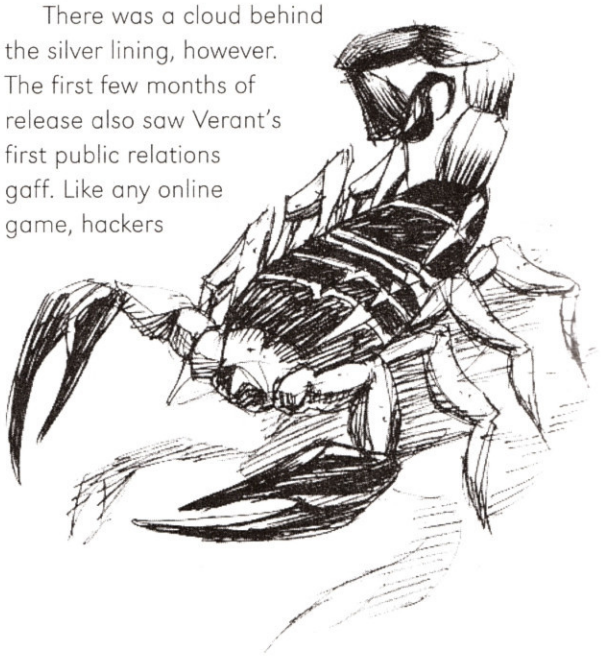
Although it had suffered its difficulties, as the first month after the launch continued, the game had become a success. The bandwidth and router issues had been settled, people were playing, and most important of all, they were having fun.

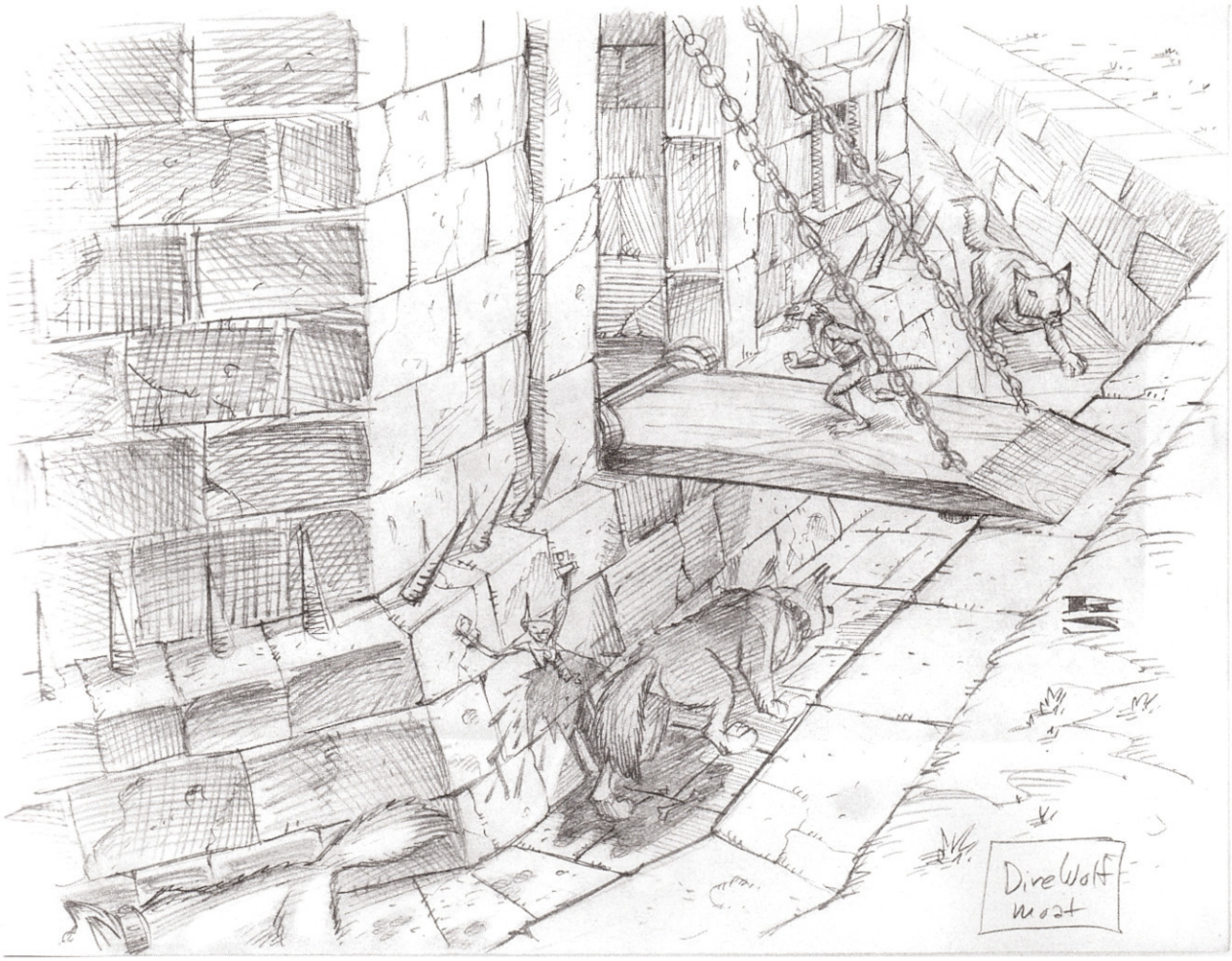
"I had a habit early on of taking customer service calls myself, mainly because I wanted to know what was going on," Smedley said. "About a month after the game launched, I got this guy on the phone who wanted to yell at me because his son had been suspended from school. Every day his dad had dropped him at school, he had snuck home and played the game. After three days, the school had noticed, called the father, who called us."

"They played and played," McQuaid remembered, "month after month, year after year, and we truly recaptured the magic that we'd experienced playing MUDs for so long."

The quality of the game was being recognized in the industry as well. On January 1, 2000, *Gamespot* gave *EverQuest* its "Game of the Year" award. As *EverQuest* swiftly became the most successful North American MMORPG on the market, one thing had become increasingly clear: if *Ultima Online* had brought the MMORPG onto the Internet, *EverQuest* had brought it into its own.

There was a cloud behind the silver lining, however. The first few months of release also saw Verant's first public relations gaff. Like any online game, hackers





were a large issue, and Verant started to use a program that would monitor the programs running on the player's computer, searching for cheat programs. If one was found, the user's account would be banned.

"We didn't report back what programs were running," Smedley recalled. "We reported back a bit that said, 'This person is running *EverHack*.' Early on, somebody found this out, and we very quickly had to change our stance on that—now we're privacy advocates. It bothers me still to this day, though, that we have easy means of catching people who are cheating, but now it's tough because we can't use them. So now we have to do it the hard way—we have to look at what they're doing on the server, seeing if they're trying to cheat, and we catch 30 people or so every day. It bothers me that we are trying to protect the game from cheaters, and we are using methods that are less than adequate."

BUILDING THE LEGACY

As the beta testing became better received, Smedley, McQuaid, and the team at Verant began to realize what they had created. With the entire continent of Kunark already designed, but having been removed from the original *EverQuest* release due to gameplay considerations, the idea of an expansion for the game became a serious consideration.

To a degree, the *EverQuest* team members had always hoped to be able to expand on the world they had created. How they would do it, however, was another consideration, and one that had been only half-considered. Most of the development team, Smedley included, honestly

EverQuest Live Team

"Heading up the *EverQuest* Live team was an awesome responsibility, but it was also a fantastic opportunity. I had to manage the development team, be involved in the decision-making processes of what we would be doing for the ongoing maintenance of the game, planning out and implementing the expansions, working with customer service to craft the vision of where the game and its expansions would go, hiring people for the team, and working with customer service to establish the apprentice program. As the company grew larger and additional teams were created, *EverQuest II* for instance, the *EverQuest* Live team was drawn from heavily to staff those other teams."

—Jeff Butler

didn't expect the game to last more than a couple of years, with player projections of 70,000 regular players over two years—a success, but not a lasting one. Some elements of expanding the game, such as raising the level cap, would require part of the game to be rewritten, if it became necessary. The game was capable of patching itself, but if it didn't sell well enough, putting an entire expansion pack onto the shelves would be pointless. It was a pleasant surprise when the game managed to exceed all expectations.

BRAD MCQUAID

Brad McQuaid, Jeff Butler, and another *EverQuest* team member at a trade show

After a couple of months, once the initial problems with the *EverQuest* launch had been resolved, the Verant team began to work on an expansion for the game, which would come to be titled *The Ruins of Kunark*. At the same time, still expecting *EverQuest* to have a short lifetime, planning began for a sequel, *EverQuest II*, to replace the game. In addition, Verant had launched the *EverQuest* Live team, a small group of game developers headed by Jeff Butler, in March 2000, whose purpose was to keep the game balanced by adding and altering content in the already existing zones. By the time work began on *The Shadows of Luclin*, the third expansion released in December 2001, the team was playing an active part in the design of upcoming expansions.

Verant quickly realized that its first expansion would have to address a couple of major issues, many brought on by the popularity of the game itself. The players were blazing through the game like wildfire, forcing the team to come up with new content and areas. At the same time, the original level cap of 50 had come to be a hindrance. The team had to find a way of increasing the levels without making the game too easy or trivializing earlier high-end encounters.

"We didn't have enough experience at that point to start second-guessing what we had done," Trost said. "We knew our procedures pretty well of how to make content and put it in the world, so that's what we focused on. *Kunark* was really 'Let's do more.'"

The solution McQuaid and his team came up with was to add ten new levels, but to make each one much more difficult to achieve. In theory, this would mean that players would have to work harder to get from level 50 to 51 than they had to get from level 49 to 50. While the level addition achieved its goals, it also backfired slightly, making the game more difficult for players than was necessary.

"In hindsight, I'm glad we did it," said

McQuaid. "But it could have been done better, especially without frustrating players with such long periods between rewarding them with new levels, skills, and spells. The Alternate Advancement system I came up with later, while still far from perfect, was a better idea and probably should have been more in the direction we should have headed from the beginning."

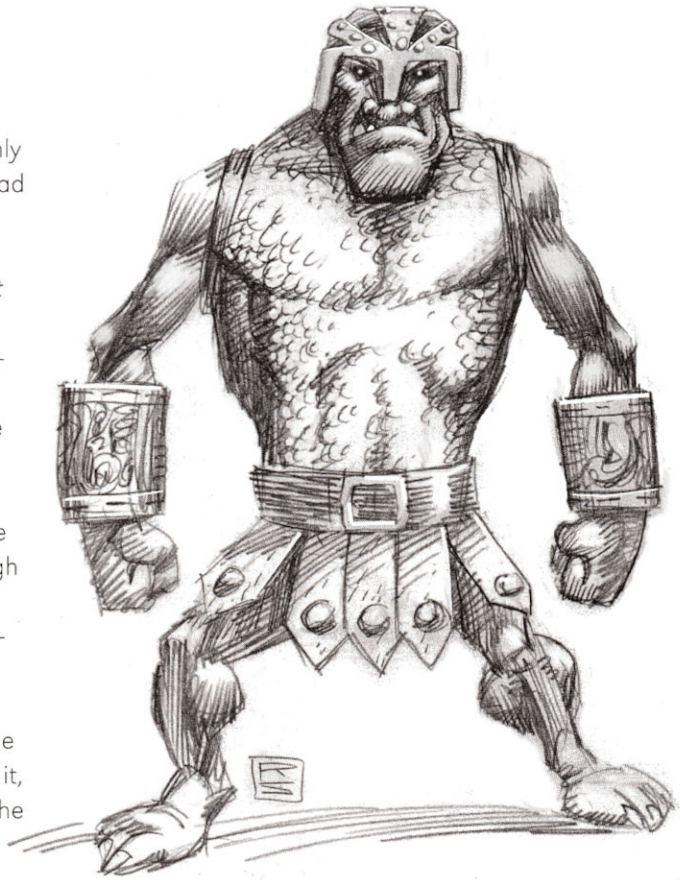
The Ruins of Kunark

Enhancing the game design was not the only challenge the *EverQuest* team faced. Verant had grown in leaps and bounds—what had been a 25-person team during the beta testing period had grown to about 60 people, and *EverQuest* was no longer the company's only project. The original design team members were now working on several games, including *Sovereign*, *Planetside*, and what would eventually become *Star Wars: Galaxies*.

At the same time, Verant was seeking new blood. One form of recruitment came to be the volunteer Game Masters, who were put through an "apprentice" program. Through this, they were able to try out positions in game development, and many were hired to be associate game designers and even world builders. The program was an incredible success—most of the new development team members came out of it, with the end result that the people designing the game were also fans of the game.

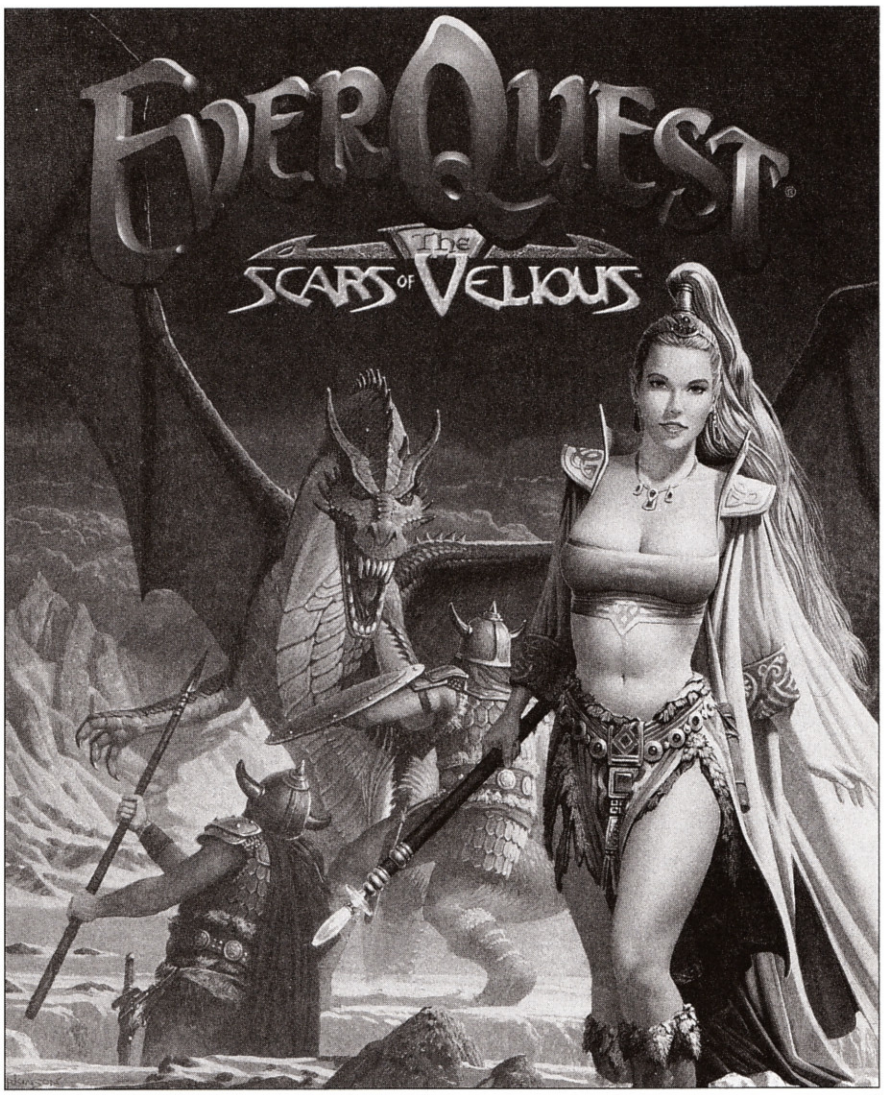
For *The Ruins of Kunark* development team, it was entirely a matter of building on what was already there, rather than designing new systems. New spells, areas, levels, and general content were added, but no dramatic changes were made to the game.

The Ruins of Kunark was released on April 24, 2000. Like the original *EverQuest* game before it, it was a great success. The regular subscriber base was creeping toward the 300,000 mark, and Verant's star was rising. On May 31, Sony Pictures Entertainment made its move and acquired Verant. Verant became Sony Online Entertainment (SOE), with Smedley at the head and McQuaid as vice president of premium games. For Verant, the acquisition opened doors that the company



had only dreamed about. For the team members who had been around since the beginning, it was like a homecoming.

"We had started out as part of Sony, so when we broke up to become Verant, that was a nervous time," Trost said. "Everybody knows the success rate of start-ups—we all had faith in *EverQuest*, though. So it was awesome that we were able to deliver *EverQuest* and then be reacquired by Sony. We had the sense of having done this thing on our own but then get the stability back of having a big brother like Sony."



The Scars of Velious box art

McQuaid recalled, "It primarily continued to grow the company. It made it even better funded and turned it into not only a developer but also a publisher." Indeed, the success of *EverQuest* had also provided an ideal design environment once Sony had reacquired it—as far as the media giant was concerned, the *EverQuest* team could make a successful game on its own, and the development team was left alone to do what it did best.

While the first expansion was doing rather well, Sony Online began to work on a new expansion, titled *The Scars of Velious*. Unlike *Kunark*, which had content for all character levels, Sony decided early on that *Velious* was to be focused on the higher-end game. As McQuaid remembers, it was where most of the players were anyway.

"In hindsight, I think this was the right call," McQuaid said. "As a MMOG (Massively Multiplayer Online Game) grows and matures, the high end becomes a bit top heavy and really needs a lot of new and challenging content."

The Scars of Velious involved considerably more work than the previous expansion—unlike

Kunark, which had been using a continent laid out by the original design team, the new expansion required that a brand-new continent be created. However, the development team was able to continue to use the existing engine, which allowed them to just keep adding new content and servers, rather than actually overhauling anything.

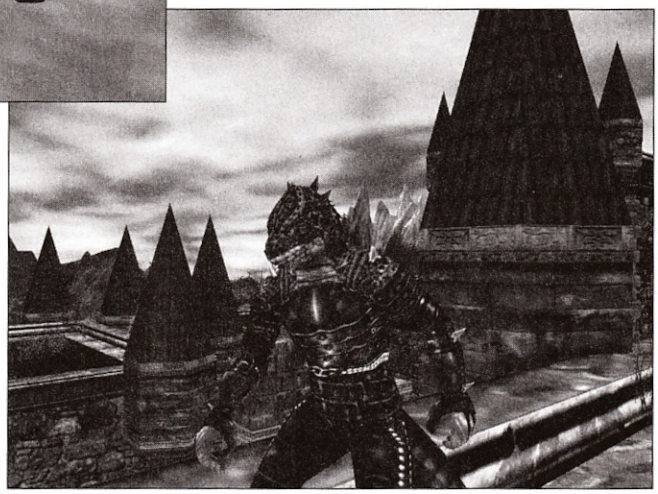
The Scars of Velious

Still, *Velious* had a much different focus than the previous expansions. Where most of the *EverQuest* experience had been freeform, *The Scars of Velious* had a linear storyline. While players could still go wherever they wanted, the best way to make any progress was to grab onto the storyline and follow it through. The artwork was also more ambitious, as the development team pushed the game and its engine further and further from the original.

Midway through development, on October 30, 2000, *EverQuest* set a new record for North American massively multiplayer games when it signed subscriber number 300,000. The new expansion, however, didn't launch until December 4 of that year.

Velious was an even greater success than *The Ruins of Kunark*. Within five days, the expansion pack sold more than 100,000 copies. Sony quickly began work on a third expansion, *The Shadows of Luclin*, set on Norrath's moon.

The Shadows of Luclin represented a new challenge for the *EverQuest* team. Where earlier they could manage by just adding new material to the existing engine, the graphics engine was now two years old and obsolete. With *Dark Age of Camelot* on the horizon from Mythic Entertainment, the *EverQuest* game engine needed a complete overhaul to remain competitive—one that would be compatible with older versions of the game, so that those who hadn't bought the expansion could still play. The client-end graphics were rewritten by Ray Elthan.



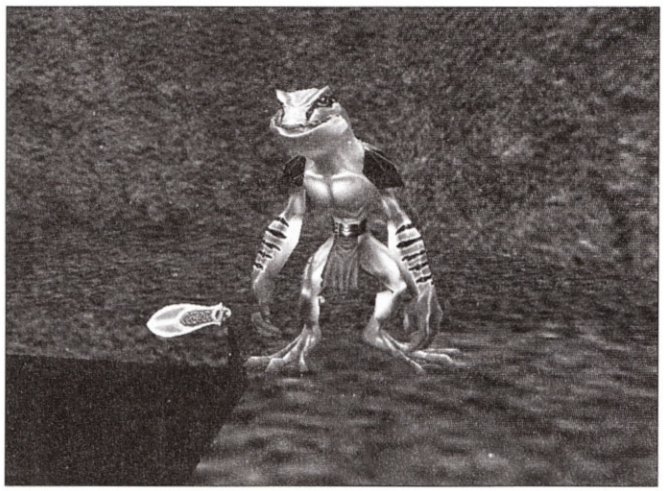
The graphics update for *The Shadows of Luclin*

"The memory requirements were very, very steep," said Uzun, who worked on *Velious* as a technical consultant. "In retrospect, they probably should have considered limiting the scope of what was being enhanced. But they enhanced everything—it was very ambitious. The engine wasn't rewritten from the ground up, but it was heavily revamped."

It was a challenge that would take Sony a year. The gameplay strategy for *Luclin* reflected the earlier *Kunark*—the content was for characters

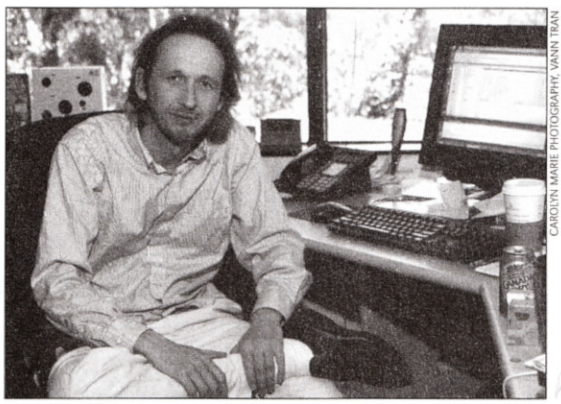
of any level. Once again, McQuaid headed the project, along with Butler. But change was on the wind.

As June passed, and *EverQuest* signed customer number 400,000, McQuaid found himself longing for the days when he had been involved in the development at a hands-on level. McQuaid and Butler decided to leave Sony and to found a new company, Sigil Games. While McQuaid left in October, Butler, and a number of the *Luclin* team, *EverQuest* Live team, and team members from the other projects, stayed on to finish the expansion before joining Sigil. McQuaid was replaced by Rod Humble, who had originally been brought on to helm the Sony Playstation game *EverQuest Online Adventures* (which is covered in detail in Chapter 8).



The Legacy of Ykesha

"It was a little bit weird at first," Smedley said, "but the game itself continued on because



CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY, VANN TRAN

Rod Humble

the team was already there, they knew the game inside and out, and the heart and soul was still there. What's amazing about it is that the heart and soul is the game itself, and as people have moved on and off the team, it continues to be there."

Exactly a year after the release of *The Scars of Velious*, on December 4, 2001, Sony released *The Shadows of Luclin*. The expansion broke all previous records, selling more than 120,000 copies in its first day.

Having regrouped from the loss caused by McQuaid and Butler's departure, Sony began work on another new expansion. While the engine remained intact, the content was an issue. Players had already explored two new continents on Norrath and even ventured to the moon. This forced the design team to focus on the planes of existence themselves.

"It was a mostly AI [artificial intelligence], script-enhancement, and content-driven expansion," Uzun said. The script enhancement proved to be one of the most important features, as it allowed the team to create events for the players to experience without requiring a game master to run them.

The Planes of Power was released on October 21, 2002, and quickly proved to be a success like its predecessors, selling more than 200,000 copies in the first week. With each expansion outselling the preceding one, Sony decided to try an experiment with the next release. It's new expansion, *The Legacy of Ykesha*, was released on February 24, 2003, as a download, rather than as a packaged CD.

"It was really an experiment—nobody had ever done it before," Humble said. "Everybody had talked about it, though, so it was very much

a matter of, 'Hey, let's give this a go.'"

In many ways, *Ykesha* was similar to *The Planes of Power*. It was content driven, with new character and object models. Designed for players around level 30 and up, the story revolved around the aftermath of the fall of Grobb, where the entire city was swamped by frogloks and the trolls were driven out. For the launch of the expansion, the scripting underwent its first big test, as on February 12, 2003, the fall of Grobb was played out as a scripted event entirely controlled by the game.

"The coolest thing that they did with the *Planes* and *Ykesha* was this elaborate script that led up to it," Trost recalled. "It really tested this new technology that the *EverQuest* Live team had put into the game. Previously, these big events were very labor intensive on the performing aspect—you had to have lots of live GMs in there actually orchestrating stuff. Whereas the fall of Grobb, which led up to *Ykesha*, was literally going into the server, talking to one NPC, and that set the whole thing in motion."

As the development of *EverQuest*'s expansions continued, the team began to realize that it actually had a long-term phenomenon on their hands. The (as of yet unreleased) *EverQuest II* remained in development, but the goal of the game slowly changed. Instead of being a replacement for *EverQuest*, Smedley decided to make it a complimentary product.

"We did not expect *EverQuest* to have the legs that it had," Smedley said. "That's changed now. We've now figured out that we have such a strong user base that what we want to do is give them another option, another place to play in the *EverQuest* universe. So, we set the timeline in the future—they can't bring their characters over, but there are a lot of things that they can affect from one game to the other. It's going to be a very different game."

"Once we found out that *EverQuest* and *EverQuest II* were going to be working separately it freed us up a lot," said Trost. "The spirit of *EverQuest*, the sense of cooperation, interdependence between characters, and feeling like a hero, that's what we had to maintain. The actual nuts and bolts of the game we had a lot more freedom with, because we weren't trying to replicate exactly what a magician is, for example."

FALL OF GROBB

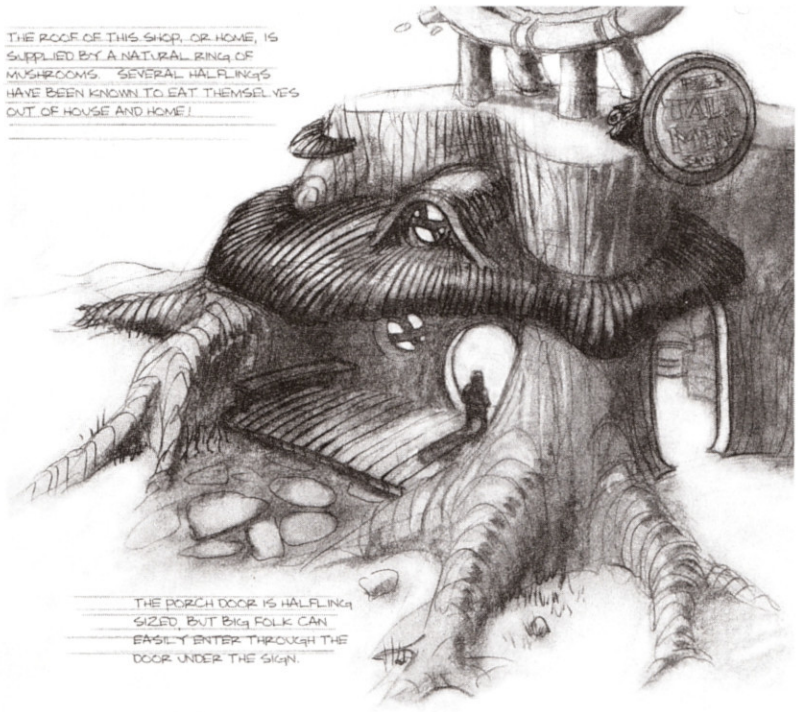
"The players logged in one day, and the frog war drums were beating, and these hordes of frogs came out and besieged Grobb, and the players started getting beaten down. And the great thing is, the word spread across the servers, so we sat in the conference room with the big screen TV with popcorn, watching the event. And the players would come in from all over the servers to either defend the trolls or help the frogs, so there were these mass battles going on.

"One of the things was that usually in *EverQuest* to escape a monster all you have to do is run across the zone line. Well, in this event, the creatures were zoning. So people would be running into the city to try and escape, and it was like, "Oh no, that's not going to work!" So, they were in the city, and the monsters would come and kill them. We were just dying of laughter—we were here until 1:00 AM, just sitting and watching it all."

—Rod Humble

Between the time that *EverQuest* had been released and the development team began working on *EverQuest II*, several lessons had been learned. For one thing, the team realized that *EverQuest II*, like its predecessor, would probably be around for several years. They designed the gameplay mechanics to be completely extendable on the upper end, allowing them to add new character levels and content without having to make major changes to the engine.

The development team also began using tried and tested commercial tools for graphics


THE ROOF OF THIS SHOP, OR HOME, IS SUPPLIED BY A NATURAL RING OF MUSHROOMS. SEVERAL HALFLINGS HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO EAT THEMSELVES OUT OF HOUSE AND HOME!
THE PORCH DOOR IS HALFLING SIZED, BUT BIG FOLK CAN EASILY ENTER THROUGH THE DOOR UNDER THE SIGN.

***EverQuest II* concept art—Rivervale**

and level design, avoiding the problems that plagued them during the development of *EverQuest*. Not only did everything run much more smoothly than it had earlier, but with the already 70-person team expanding, it became much easier for new team members to just hop in and begin working on the game.

"It's not nearly as hard on the artists just to get levels designed," Uzun said. "It's not nearly as hard on the designers to get content into the game."

"We're putting a lot of emphasis and resources on tools," said John Blakely, one of *EverQuest II*'s senior producers, "with the expectation that this product will be around at least half as long or hopefully longer than its predecessor. This graphics engine is completely new—we built it from the ground up. None of the technology is licensed, and all of our experience with upgrades to the past *EverQuest* engine have gone into it."

The intention for the new graphics engine was that it would run well on systems that don't even exist yet. As it is, the engine at its highest settings can currently bring any computer running it to a standstill—however, by having such a high end, any future upgrades that players make to their computers will have an immediate visual improvement, without short-changing them in the short term.

With the project under development for such a long time, however, certain changes to the initial design occurred. When Humble took over McQuaid's job shortly before *The Planes of Power*, he took a close look at *EverQuest II* and changed the zoning system. Although the game had been planned to be completely zoneless,

Humble decided that this was impractical and changed the design.

"The hard drive footprint would have been 15 gigabytes," Humble recalled. "It was a problem that nobody had really thought of. So one of the decisions I made was to make it zone-based, which I always preferred. I had just finished *EverQuest Online Adventures*, which was a zoneless game, so I knew how hard it was to do. Still, there's a characteristic about a lot of the people here, which is that their ambition is so massive that even when they underachieve, it is absolutely stunning."

Humble also wanted to bring the game back to a more hardcore *Dungeons & Dragons* tone, where the player had some fear of the creatures around him. Rather than have *uber*-characters that could handle anything, Humble wanted there to be a constant feeling of suspense.

One of the key issues for the team, however, was bringing new players into the game. Since *EverQuest II* was to be a complementary product instead of a replacement, the team wanted to ensure that it would appeal to new players without undercutting the already extant *EverQuest* community. To do this, the game had to be friendly to people who had never played a massively multiplayer, or for that matter a role-playing, game.

CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY, VANN TRAN

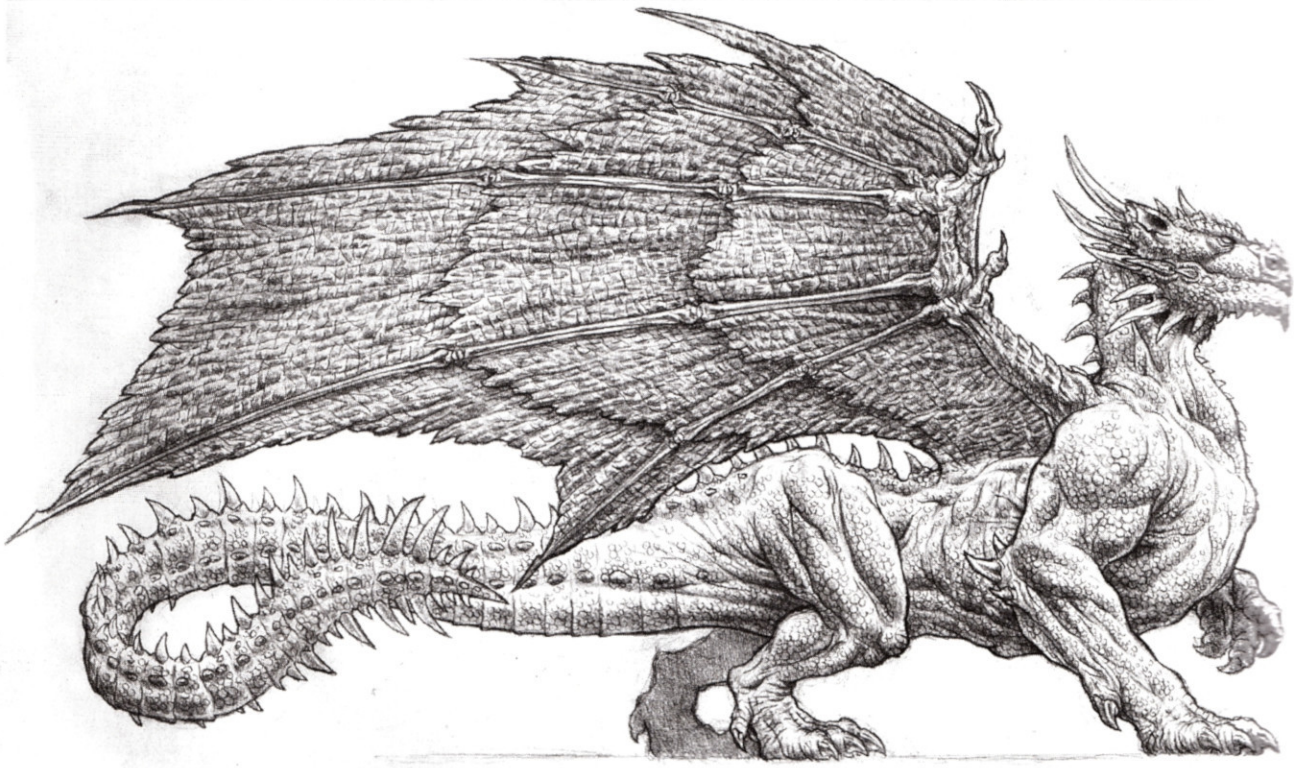
John Blakely

"*EverQuest*, while an awesome game, is an intimidating game to get into," Blakely said. "Most RPGs are pretty intimidating—you get into the game, and you get hit over the head with a bunch of numbers and kind of strange concepts. We're trying to make it a more accessible game by reducing the number of decisions that you have to make at the beginning, easing people into it more. The game still has all those options, but we're introducing them at a more measured pace, so that new people really have an idea of what they're doing."

The *EverQuest II* engine—A Kerran in Freeport

For the development team, much of the design methodology was based on looking at what had worked in the previous game and improving on it. For example, the trade skills, which had originally been added to *EverQuest* as an afterthought, had become far more popular than anybody had expected. For *EverQuest II*, the trade skills were made an integral part of the game, where the player could gain experience toward a new level by making things. Additionally, the team decided that the two games would be linked, with events in the original *EverQuest* directly affecting *EverQuest II*, which is set 500 years later than its predecessor.

"Capturing lightning in a bottle is a tough thing to do," Blakely said. "Making sequels, like *EverQuest II*, to a game that is still successful, and still going today, is a challenge that we're trying to figure out right now. And so we're



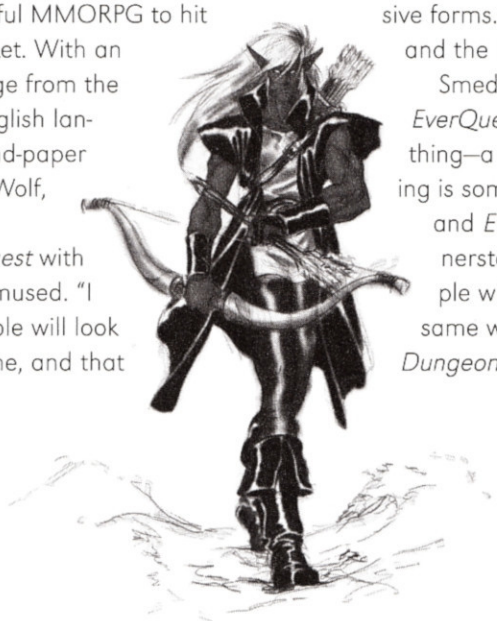
***EverQuest II* concept art—a dragon**

trying to figure out how those two products work together, how they exist together, and how they will continue together to appeal to the audiences of online entertainment."

In less than three years, *EverQuest* had become the most successful MMORPG to hit the North American market. With an upcoming sequel, language from the game seeping into the English language, and even a pen-and-paper game released by White Wolf, its legacy seems assured.

"I look back at *EverQuest* with a lot of pride," McQuaid mused. "I very much hope that people will look back and see a great game, and that it turns out to be just the tip of the iceberg. In my opinion the massively multiplayer online gamespace will grow until it rivals that of movies, with truly interactive entertainment taking its rightful place next to more traditional passive forms. The technology will get better, and the Internet more mature."

Smedley added, "I think in the future *EverQuest* will be an ongoing, viable thing—a social phenomenon. Online gaming is something that will continue to grow, and *EverQuest* will be one of the cornerstones of that. I'm hopeful that people will remember *EverQuest* in the same way that they remember *Dungeons & Dragons*."



Dissecting the MMORPG: EverQuest's Design Roots

CHAPTER 4

He had survived everything, developing a facility that was the envy of players everywhere on the Net. He was the most famous character in the Middle Country game, recruited for every battle, first choice for every important task.

—*Tad Williams*, Otherland: City of Golden Shadow

At first glance, games such as *EverQuest* may seem like conventional role-playing games. You create a character, complete quests, and wander around a fantasy world. However, when you dig beneath the surface of the game, you find that each massively multiplayer online game is quite a different animal.

For one thing, the game doesn't end. Quests can be related to a story, but the story doesn't actually have a climax; you finish your quests and then keep on playing. Also, the other characters around you are played by real people; this isn't necessarily strange in terms of most multiplayer games, but in the case of *EverQuest* and its cousins, the multitude of players form an entire subculture of their own.

This all means that there's no way to win, and much of the game sometimes seems to be based on community rather than storytelling. Is there something wrong with this picture?

Not at all. In fact, these are two of the attributes that make an MMORPG what it is.

BACK TO THE BASICS: WHAT MAKES A GOOD GAME

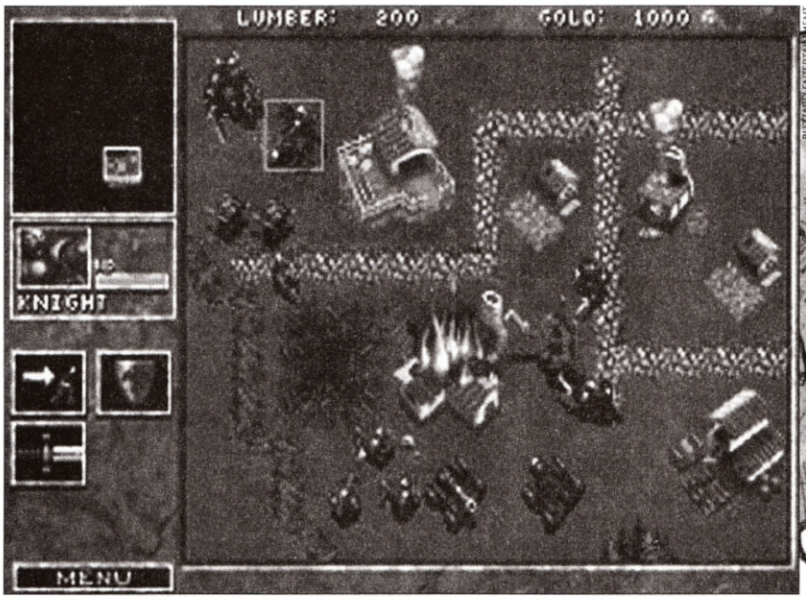
To understand the MMORPG, you must first understand computer games themselves, which isn't as easy as it may appear. For example, as you are no doubt aware (after all, you're reading this right now), I write books. In fact, back in 2000, I had the honor of inaugurating Blizzard's entire fiction line with an e-book entitled *Diablo: Demonsbane*. However, while I may be a fantasy author, I'm under no illusions that I'm a computer game designer.

As I've noticed again and again, just because something is a good story, doesn't mean it is a good game.

The basis of any computer game is gameplay. That is, and always will be, the bottom line. Without good gameplay, the game isn't fun and people won't want to play it, even if the story was written by J.R.R. Tolkien himself. But what makes for good gameplay?

From the start, the player must have something interesting to do. For example, in *EverQuest*, a player can be quite happy clicking a mouse for hours just to forge a sword. At first glance, that seems about as interesting as watching paint dry, but people still do it. At the end of the process, however, the player has a new sword, which their character can then go on to use against monsters, helping to finish off that multi-layered quest that they have been working on for days.

The player's actions also need variety. Everybody remembers *Warcraft* and the clones it spawned. However, one of the reasons that *Warcraft* succeeded and most of its imitators failed was that the missions in *Warcraft* were not necessarily increasingly more difficult, but were instead different from one another. Players would go from razing an enemy fortress in one mission to hunting an evil sorcerer through some caves in the next.



A tactical mission from *Warcraft*

The sequels also had a number of different types of missions; it is this variety that kept players coming back for more in the single-player mode—not special effects or gore.

For role-playing games, and especially for adventure or maze games, players also need to be able to discover new things. This doesn't necessarily mean the game world should be big enough to house the population of China, but players should be able to learn about their surroundings and the story itself at their own pace, and they should have lots of things to learn. A great example is the original *Diablo*—this game, one of the first Internet-capable non-MUD multiplayer role-playing games, was essentially a dungeon crawl. However, the dungeons were randomly generated, along with the quests at the single-player level, so every time the player went down, the dungeon was different. This type of discovery allowed the game to have a lifetime of more than four years, while most other games of its kind were lucky to last a year.

Texture is also important. "Texture" may not seem like a word that can be applied to computer games, but it is quite apt. Just as every author's writing style has a unique quality, the gameplay needs to have a certain combination of atmosphere, simplicity, and character to succeed.

Simplicity in a game interface is absolutely vital. While in some cases, such as for detailed flight simulations, this isn't possible, in most others it is, and it behooves game developers to find the simplest interface for their product. Both *Diablo II* and *Warcraft II* could be played with a single button mouse and no keyboard; is it any surprise that they are among the most successful games in history? A simple interface allows the player to concentrate on the game instead of its mechanics, which can make all the difference between fun and frustration.

A good atmosphere is sometimes one of the more difficult things to achieve. When we think of the most atmospheric games, we usually end up thinking of games such as *DOOM*. Why is this? *DOOM* was almost plotless, after all. However, it was also a game that was genuinely frightening and could make you jump. Another great example is *Eye of the Beholder*, an old first-person *Dungeons & Dragons* game. I still remember wandering down a hallway with my band of adventurers, hearing water drip in the background, staring ahead into the dark, and then having my head hit the ceiling as my cleric noticed that a skeleton had snuck up behind us and cast his "turn undead" spell. Like *DOOM*, I had been completely sucked in by the atmosphere of the game.

Atmosphere itself has three elements: the visual design of the setting, the background

Shadowlands—A Game Without Simplicity

All three of the elements of texture are necessary for a good game, and this fact may be best illustrated in a game that actually failed. Back in the early 1990s, Domark released a game titled *Shadowlands*. This game was a dungeon crawl, where the player controlled four characters, each with a customizable face. The game had realistic lighting, and the characters were almost fully animated (for example, if one found something on the ground and picked it up, you would see the character bend down). Unfortunately, *Shadowlands* also had an interface that was almost unusable—there was no way to make everybody attack something at once, and it was quite possible for a small monster to kill one of the characters while you were trying to order the other three into battle.

noises, and the story (which may sound like an odd choice, but bear with me). Visual design relates to the spaces players wander through as they play; for example, a high cathedral ceiling will create a certain atmosphere, especially when lit in certain ways. Sound effects or music complete the sensory part of the atmosphere; take a long, dark, cramped, poorly lit corridor, and add the sound of dripping water, and you get an eerie, abandoned feeling. The last element that brings the atmosphere together is the context, and this is provided by the story. Why is the player wandering down that corridor? Is it part of a nightmare, with some horrifying revelation at the end, or has the player already been attacked several times, and a monster could be about to leap out of the shadows again at any moment?

The final part of the texture is the character of the game. To a degree, this incorporates both the interface and the atmosphere, but there is more to it than that. Character lies in the smallest details. For example, in the *Warcraft* games, if you clicked a unit multiple times, it would say something funny, like "Stop poking me!" or "I should have joined the navy!" This small bit of humor, which was difficult to discover unless you stumbled across it, gave the game a character that set it apart as unique.

As soon as you add extra players, what makes the game work changes. Once again, the players need to have something to do. Wandering around and blowing each other up is fun—but only for a while. Most first-person shooters work by having goals that can be reached in cooperative play or types of power-ups (such as bigger guns, armor, and so on) that players can find to improve their chances.

Ensuring that the group dynamic works is essential for successful multiplayer gaming of any sort. Every player has to be able to do something, either independently or in a group; otherwise the game stops being fun. It is also important to have new levels or secrets for the players to explore, levels designed to let several people wander around

EverQuest—Some Statistics

Realizing the game is both a product and a service is vital. More than a million and a half copies of *EverQuest* have been sold, yet just under half a million players play regularly. Of the copies sold, approximately 800,000 copies were of the original game, and the rest were expansions. The other copies weren't bought to be fancy drink coasters; indeed, in many cases, somebody tried the game, found that it wasn't for them, and stopped playing after a couple of months. Take any Internet gaming bar and look at how many titles tend to be played for the long term. You'll probably find that only one or two of them last. The rest are fads that last a couple of months and are then relegated to the back shelf.

at once; all of this works to keep the players interested until they finish the game. The players must also be able to interact; without that, they may as well be playing a single-player game.

As soon as you get to the massively multiplayer level, however, the model shifts dramatically. Where in non-massively multiplayer games, the developer makes money through the initial sale alone, in the cases of persistent worlds, not only is a monthly fee collected, but the game also has to keep people playing for months on end. As Jessica Mulligan has stated over and over again in her column *Biting the Hand*, the massively multiplayer game is as much, if not more, a service as a product.

The basics of good game design always apply; it is still important for the game to have texture and discovery (a great deal of originality tends to help, too). However, the goal of the experience has changed. A persistent world, by definition, doesn't have an end for the player to reach. How then, does it keep people playing?

To keep even a third of the player population in the game is an impressive feat. Part of it comes from game design, but a lot of it comes from the fact that Sony does treat *EverQuest* like a service. The company spends a great deal of time trying to maintain customer goodwill—in fact, the company holds several conventions every year for the *EverQuest* community to mingle in real life. Sony also tries to ensure that the content of the game is constantly balanced, a task given to the *EverQuest Live* team, which often revamps older zones. Making certain that help is always available for a newcomer, that the content always remains fresh, that technical support is ready when it is needed, and that hackers are caught and removed from the game before they can do too much harm are the things that help make the game world a great place to be—and worth coming back to.

PLOTS AND PLAYERS

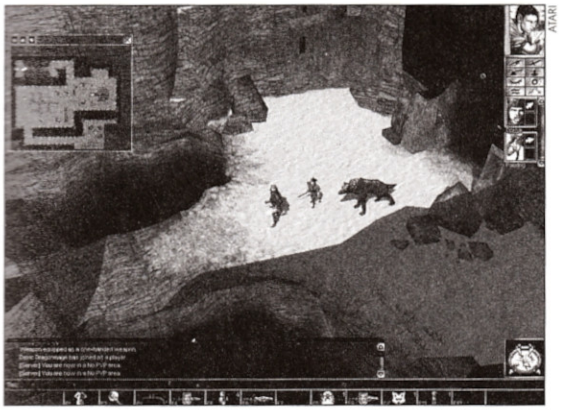
Creating a computer game doesn't require a cookie cutter and some programmers—it requires finesse, creativity, and care.

As mentioned, the context of a game is provided by the story. However, telling a story in a computer game is different from telling a story in a film or book. By its nature, the computer game is interactive; a strictly linear story often won't work. Often a game story needs to have alternative endings, if for no other reason than to retain its replay value.

One of the most common ways to tell a story in a game is to have the story framing the gameplay. Players must complete several missions, while between the missions a cut scene or text box informs them of the next part of the story. This is common in real-time strategy games such as *Warcraft* or *Starcraft*. The problem with this type of storytelling, however, is that most of the time

players have no control over the story. The cut scenes can also take away from the immersion factor of the game, as they bring players out of the gameplay while they read what appears on the screen.

The best way of telling a game story is to have the gameplay and the story completely



Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide. In this game, the story is incorporated directly into the gameplay.

linked. In short, the gameplay is the story and vice versa. This allows players to discover the storyline at their own pace, and it presents a more gripping game experience. This technique was commonplace with early adventure games (such as *King's Quest*) and more recently with role-playing games such as *Diablo II*, Bioware's *Neverwinter Nights*, and *Dungeon Siege*. This type of storytelling also gives players a great deal of control over how the story ends in certain games.

One has to play games for only a short time to realize just how powerful the computer game is as a storytelling medium. When a game is well designed, the player is a participant rather than an observer. The question naturally arises as to how such power can be applied to the MMORPG.

The question presents massively multiplayer game designers with quite the conundrum. By definition, a persistent world doesn't have an end to its story. The design of a game such as *EverQuest* thus becomes a matter of balance. As in most artistic endeavors, no solution is cut-and-dried. Design and story depend on how the designers want the game to play. A story must exist; otherwise, the persistent world itself has no reason for existing—it may as well be a chat room. On the other hand, the story can't be so overpowering that the players are locked into it, although it must be a part of the gameplay.

With so much to consider, a programmer creating the world of an MMORPG has more difficulty in store than may first appear. The world has to be rich enough that players can use it in the ways that they want, which is not necessarily what the designers may have in mind. It must be a human world, rather than a complete fabrication; the culture of a good persistent world is forged by the player community, as much of the game relies on the interaction between the players. And it must feel natural to the players; otherwise they won't be able to lose themselves in it.

It is sometimes easy for designers to forget that it is the players themselves who

make the MMORPG more than the sum of its parts. Players must be allowed enough free will to forge communities and interact with other people, creating an online world populated by real people rather than computer-controlled automatons. For this to happen, a persistent world must strike a careful balance between structured and freeform elements, and between story and a concentration on player-to-player interaction.

Relying on quests, which can work well for framing the storyline and world, can be both a benefit and a hazard for structure. On one hand, without quests the game is almost rendered plotless. On the other hand, for the game to be enjoyable to everybody, the quests must be ever-present—and every player must be able to complete them. This means that a town in danger from a monster must always be in danger, no matter how many times different players kill the creature, as a new player who hasn't completed the quest may want to do so, and it must be available.

It comes down to a matter of structure and who provides it. To take just extreme examples, in instances where the game is completely freeform and allows players to do what they will, the structure is provided by the players themselves. At the other end of the spectrum is the game for which structure is completely imposed by the designers, and the players are left to work their way through several required quests.

Take the Vorpal Bunny story below—as amusing as the story is, it is important to note that it was the *players* who determined the quest. The realm was provided with creatures by the game designers, but the players themselves created the structure of the Vorpal Bunny hunt and initiated the events that would result in the unstoppable rabbit. This model of play is beneficial to players who enjoy being free to do anything they want; in some games, they are even allowed to own houses and land in the persistent world. Also, since the structure is determined by the

HUNTING THE VORPAL BUNNY

An incident from *Asheron's Call* (related at a panel in a Toronto Trek convention) illustrates the freeform model perfectly. In *Asheron's Call*, level 10 to 14 characters can hunt a creature named the Vorpal Bunny—it's inspired by the killer rabbit from *Monty Python and the Search for the Holy Grail*. A group of higher level adventurers decided that they wanted to hunt the bunny past level 14 without it being too easy, and they began a letter campaign to the systems operator, or SYSOP, of the server they were using. The SYSOP agreed to the change, and he increased the statistics of the Vorpal Bunny. Mollified, the adventurers went out in search of the creature.

A couple of hours later, the last survivor staggered into town, Vorpal Bunny right behind him. He led the monster right into the town square where characters, without the benefit of armor or weapons, are resurrected, or respawn, after dying. It was a slaughter; the creature was so fast that players were forced to get screen shots just to see what it looked like, and before long more than 300 corpses littered the town square. A group of wizards perched on a tower to attack the Bunny, only to discover that it was immune to magic. Somehow, one of the players managed to lure it out of the town square, saving the town.

This was the incident that sparked the first all-server Vorpal Bunny Hunt. The hunt was opened to anybody over level 20, and multitudes came. Then they all went out hunting for the Vorpal Bunny. None survived the experience, and, as the story goes, the Bunny is still out there, although it has been made slow enough now that players can run away.

people inside the persistent world, individual players are capable of making a difference (saving a town from marauding player killers, and so on). However, this model also prevents a strong sense of story from developing and can be confusing to newcomers. When no quests are available to complete, and you're facing a brand new world, you may be left shaking your head and wondering "now what?"

The other extreme allows little free choice for players, beyond their character class and who they adventure with. This extreme provides a strong sense of story, as players are able to complete quests. However, as mentioned, the quests and monsters must always be available, preventing any individual player from making a difference in the overall realm. In a worst-case scenario, players can be left waiting in line to complete that last vital quest, a situation that is usually considered somewhat less than fun. In this model, it is up to the game designers to add as many interesting tasks as they can into each part of the game, as characters will eventually run out of things to do as the months go by.

Few, if any, MMORPGs end up at either of these extremes. Most tend to end up somewhere close to the middle of the scale, with quests and the freeform aspect balanced out to allow players to have some structure imposed and a sense of story, but also the freedom to do what they will once they log on. Regardless of where the game sits on the scale, a story is needed to provide some context. Otherwise, neither the players nor the monsters have any reason for being there. In some cases, the story can be quite detailed; *Anarchy Online*, for example, was originally planned to have a set story that played out for four years, which players would discover as the months passed. While much of that had to be removed after the game launched, some of the story is still played out. However, the more detailed the story, the less freedom the players have to affect it.

The nature of the MMORPG's world building can have unexpected consequences. With so many people in one place at one time, especially in less structured games, an actual subculture develops with those who want to help the community and those who want to slaughter other characters (these players are called player-killers). While some prefer to duel, others like to hunt, often picking on weaker characters who can't defend themselves.

This presents a grave issue for MMORPG designers. A good persistent world is fun for

Ultima Online—Player-Killing Gone Wrong

If not managed carefully, the player-killer community can be disastrous for an MMORPG. *Ultima Online,* for example, was launched with the idea that the players would create their own justice system and become entirely self-regulating. Instead, the player-killers ran rampant, creating a situation where the persistent world was filled with random acts of violence, the strong victimizing the weak, and petty warlords controlling areas of turf. Origin finally separated the game world into player-vs.-player and non-player-vs.-player shards, with 80 percent of the players deciding to leave for the shards without player-killers.

casual players and player-killers alike, with something to offer everybody. While most casual players would be happy to have player-killers completely out of the equation, taking steps to do so also removes an element of free will—after all, some role players do choose to play evil characters. Also, with various members of the game's community organized into guilds or clans, the occasional guild or clan war will happen, and this can only be resolved through player killings.

Player-killers can be dealt with in numerous ways. The easiest method is simply to segregate casual players and player-killers, providing the latter with a separate server where they can kill, and be killed, to their hearts' content, a solution used in part by *EverQuest.* Other solutions include a method used by *Diablo II,* where for a player duel or killing to take place, both people have to consent to it.

One of the most ingenious solutions was presented by Mythic Entertainment for *Dark Age of Camelot.* In this game, the actual end of the game revolves around a war between three player realms, where players can go into the borderlands and kill players from other realms. Those who don't want to player-kill don't have to go into the borderlands.

This also presents an interesting combination of structured and freeform world design; as soon as you get to the borderlands, the persistent world is freeform, but outside of the player-killer zone it is structured.

An extension of this was used for *Shadowbane,* an MMORPG that also had a non-player-vs.-player early game. After their characters reach level 20, however, players can go as far as to build cities, create kingdoms, and make war on other players' land.

The story, world, and player community are only parts of the essentials of MMORPG design. Players must be able to build characters, making them more powerful over time through developing skills and finding or cre-

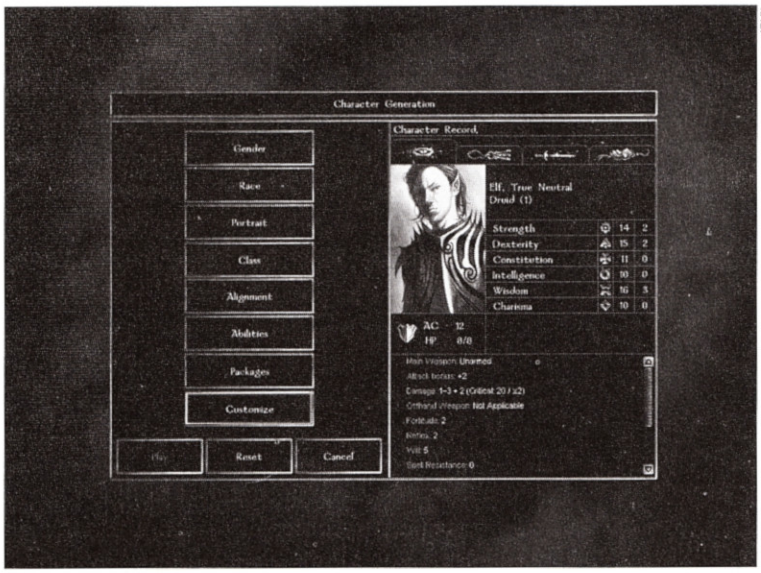
Fighting in the borderlands between Albion and Hybernia in *Dark Age of Camelot*

ating magical items of increasing power; without this there is no sense of accomplishment. To a degree, it is the fact that the players have actually built a character that they can be proud of that keeps them coming back for more.

Character development is a tricky business. Like structure in the game world, no cut-and-dried technique exists for creating the perfect type of character development. This aspect is strongly dictated not only by the philosophy of the designers, but also by the options available to the players when they play.

The classical type of character development is the character class. This is common among computer games, although it goes back as far as the original tabletop *Dungeons & Dragons* game of the early 1970s. The player decides what type of profession he or she wants a character to pursue upon creation. This is called a character class; once this is selected, the player has certain skills allotted to that type of character that they can build up, allowing for specialization inside the class, but not for any specialization outside of it.

A character class-based system is developed in a couple of ways. The first is through the classic *AD&D* system, where the character gains experience as the game goes on, and after a certain point moves up a level;



ATARI

Character creation from *Neverwinter Nights*, using a *Dungeons & Dragons* model

with each new level, the player can customize and specialize the character by assigning points to each skill. The second method is more freeform—not only does the character gain experience in the conventional manner, but it also advances based on its skills being practiced. This in turn gives the character more hit points and also opens up more skills to be practiced.

This class-based system tends to go in and out of style when it comes to tabletop role-playing games. Most players find it too restrictive, especially when the only constraint should be the imagination of the game master. The second type of character development system is completely freeform, with no character classes; players select what their characters look like and their statistics and then begin to play. What profession the character takes depends entirely on what the player does in the game and what skills she or he practices.

Each type of character development has its uses. The completely freeform development is ideal for games such as *Ultima Online*, which uses a freeform game model. This means that if somebody wants to become a baker, they can practice a baking skill. On the other hand, the more structured character class model tends to work best with games that are based around quests and combat. Games like *Asheron's Call* or *EverQuest* tend to hold the middle ground, using a class-based character development with several freeform elements. *Dark Age of Camelot* allows a character to spend its first few levels at one class and then change to a final specialized sub-class after a certain point.

Asheron's Call, a game straddling the line between class-based and freeform character development

As with the design of the overall game, there is no absolute right or wrong when it comes to how character development is accomplished. The more structure in the character development, the easier it tends to be on newer players—but this can also backfire, as more experienced players may find a class-based system too restrictive, especially when they find that they suddenly have to create a brand-new character if they want to change professions.

No matter which system is used, players must learn and develop numerous skills. This is absolutely necessary; unlike a conventional computer role-playing game, which may have only 80 to 100 hours of gameplay, an MMORPG has to keep a player's interest for thousands of hours. This means that the characters must be able to develop constantly, find or create new items of greater and greater power, and finally become something players can be proud of, something that they can hold up to their friends and say "I made this!"

THE CHARACTER AS COMMODITY

With players investing so much time in MMORPGs, it isn't surprising that they would be attached to their characters or to the items the characters hold. Every now and then, however, characters or items become a commodity in real life, a consistent issue in

the MMORPG genre, caused by the nature of the genre itself.

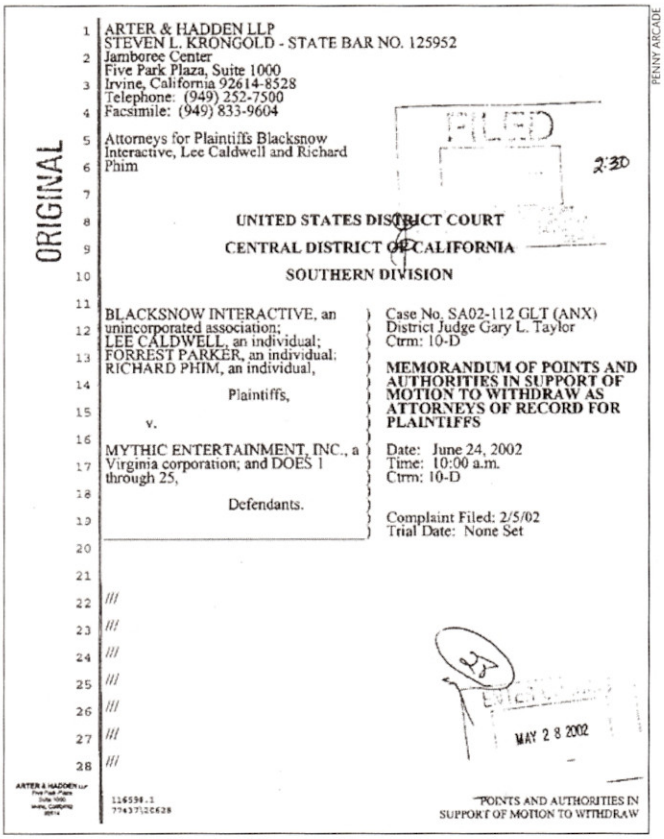
This isn't a new concept. As early as the mid-1980s, players were selling GEnie game accounts or items. When Internet-capable games such as *Diablo* and *Diablo II* were released, characters would trade or buy items from one another. Usually, this would involve in-game cash rather than real-world money, but there were exceptions. In some cases, *Ultima Online* items or characters have sold for more than $3000.

While Origin tolerated these sorts of transactions with *Ultima Online*, other MMORPG providers have tried to curtail it. This didn't stop real-world sales from becoming big business; one company, named BlackSnow Interactive, or BSI, tried to make an entire industry out of creating characters in MMORPGs, using hacks to beef them up and then selling them to clients.

This resulted in one of the oddest incidents ever noted in the computer game field. Companies such as Verant or Mythic Entertainment placed clauses in their end-user license agreements preventing the sales of any online characters or items on the grounds that the players were renting time and storage space on the servers and thus did not own the characters they created. BSI began to create characters on the servers of *Dark Age of Camelot*, using hacks and exploiting bugs to build them up at the expense of legitimate players, and then they sold the characters on eBay.

Naturally, Mythic Entertainment found out about what was happening and went to eBay to shut down the BSI auctions, on the grounds that it was a violation of copyright. Mythic then sent BSI a cease and desist order.

BSI was making a living leeching off MMORPGs, and its entire profit margin was based on exploiting bugs in the Mythic system. You'd expect that the next step would be for Mythic to sue BSI when BSI didn't stop, wouldn't you?



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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
SOUTHERN DIVISION

BLACKSNOW INTERACTIVE, an unincorporated association; LEE CALDWELL, an individual; FORREST PARKER, an individual; RICHARD PHIM, an individual,

Plaintiffs,

v.

MYTHIC ENTERTAINMENT, INC., a Virginia corporation; and DOES 1 through 25,

Defendants.

Case No. SA02-112 GLT (ANX)
District Judge Gary L. Taylor
Ctrm: 10-D

MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT OF MOTION TO WITHDRAW AS ATTORNEYS OF RECORD FOR PLAINTIFFS

Date: June 24, 2002
Time: 10:00 a.m.
Ctrm: 10-D

Complaint Filed: 2/5/02
Trial Date: None Set

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POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT OF MOTION TO WITHDRAW

PENNY ARCADE

The lawsuit launched by BSI against Mythic

Instead, BSI sued Mythic.

In February 2002, BSI launched a suit against Mythic for anti-competitive practices, on the grounds that what BSI was selling was the time spent creating the characters. In March, BSI then went on to threaten FunCom, developer of *Anarchy Online*.

This is where the situation got truly strange. Since January 2002, BSI had been using scripts and various hacks to level up characters in *Anarchy Online*. The staff at FunCom became aware of it when they noticed that some characters were leveling up extremely quickly—in some cases going through levels in mere seconds. Not realizing that this was something coordinated, FunCom banned all of the accounts that had been hacked—22 of them, in fact.

Then FunCom learned about BSI, which began to take measures to reactivate the accounts. A dialogue developed between the two companies in January. In the hopes of finding the problems that had allowed BSI to cheat so effectively, FunCom ordered one of its employees, Adam Young, to negotiate with BSI; Young would make motions of releasing the accounts in return for information on what BSI was exploiting.

The conversation that ensued over ICQ (an online chat program) and e-mail was shocking. BSI revealed just about everything—how the company was using macros and hacks to create thousands of duplicated items per character, and how it was making $60,000 per month selling hacked accounts. Then, BSI offered Young a bribe of $7000 to turn a blind eye. When Young refused, they offered him another bribe, suggesting that they could hire his brother for thousands of dollars per month to do some Web design work. They stated that their strategy was to continue to sell accounts until they were blocked, and then they'd sue the MMORPG developer, even commenting that their next victim would be Verant and Sony Online. Finally, on February 12, 2002, BSI realized that the FunCom accounts weren't being reactivated, and the company threatened legal action, stating that since the lawsuit against Mythic was settled, a suit against Funcom would cost them nothing.

At this point in time, BSI had no claim to moral high ground. Not only that, but the company had provided damning evidence against itself, even lying about its suit against Mythic, which had only barely begun. You would expect that FunCom would have released all of the ICQ and mail logs, and

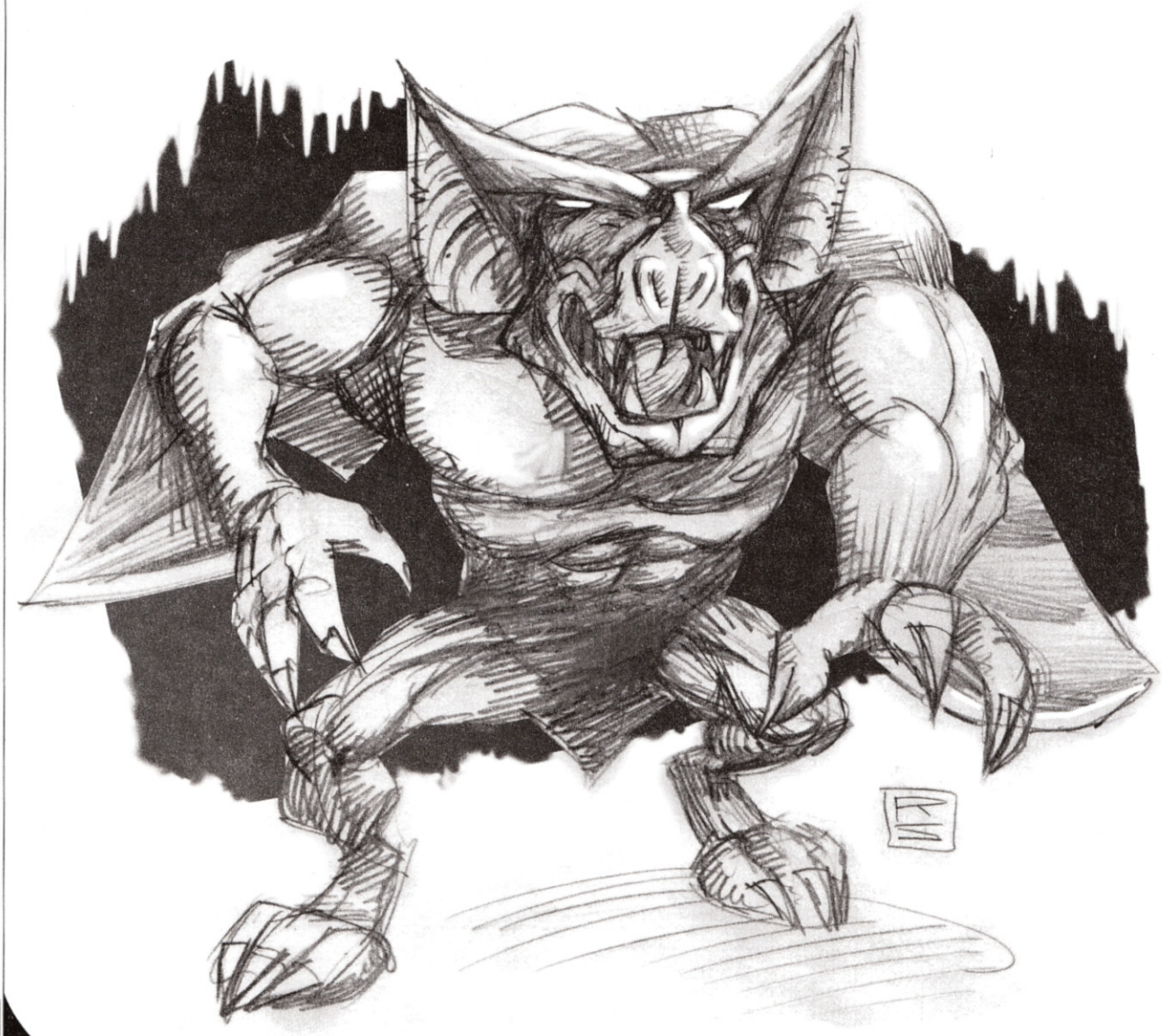
then proceeded with legal action.

Instead, the company that made the logs public, in their entirety, was BSI.

Take your time. Pick your jaw up from the floor.

This entire situation caused quite a stir in the MMORPG community. Understandably, most players were quite upset about what BSI had been doing; after spending months building up characters legitimately, who would want to see it outdone by somebody who had bought into their character? A number of guilds from *Dark Age of Camelot* banded together to bring legal action of their own against BSI, hoping to drive it out of the game for good.

And then, in early June 2002, as matters were coming to a head and the court case against Mythic moved into arbitration, BSI vanished. Quite literally, it disappeared. The company stopped accepting telephone calls and refused to reply to any form of mail or pay its legal fees. BSI's attorneys, Arter & Hadden LLP, removed themselves from the



"Less Than Minimum Wage"

The nature of the lawsuit against BSI, however, did not concern everybody, in part because it was so ridiculous. For example, John Smedley, the president of first Verant and later Sony Online Entertainment, was not bothered at all, although early on he had decided to take a stand against selling characters for real-world money.

"A person's out-of-game status should not be able to affect their in-game status," Smedley said. "For example, a rich person should not be able to buy their way into a great character. My personal feeling, and that of the rest of the team, is that it is something that could be harmful to the game. Grave harm? Probably not—but something we decided to take a stand on all the same."

Smedley recalled an incident where he had spoken directly to somebody who had bought a character for $3000 off eBay. "I asked him straight up why he did it. He said, 'Look, I've got a lot of money, and at the price that I bought the character at, and the time the kid put into it, I paid him less than minimum wage.' That makes you sit back and think."

case, saying that their client could not meet its obligations. The case against FunCom was dropped, and the case against Mythic was settled by the judge, who held that the terms of Mythic's end-user license agreement were valid.

Although BSI's lawsuit came to nothing in the end, MMORPG designers and companies had mixed reactions. Especially on the developer's end, a great deal of concern was expressed about what BSI had been doing.

"Everybody in the massively multiplayer industry was certainly concerned about the situation," said Brad McQuaid. "When people claim that having time invested in the game somehow gives them authority or ownership over elements of that game, you certainly have a situation that could threaten the entire genre itself."

As bizarre as the incident with BSI was, it did raise an important issue that reflects directly on the nature of the massively multiplayer online game: Essentially, who owns the contents?

Take a book, for example. If you go out and buy the latest Tom Clancy novel, you own the physical book itself. You can do whatever you want with the book, regardless of how bizarre it may be (so long as it doesn't break any criminal laws). You can use it to help build a tower of novels or mail it around the world, if you really want to. However, you don't own the text of the book—*that* belongs to Tom Clancy, and it is protected under copyright law. So photocopying the contents and passing the copies out to your friends is out of the question; in fact, you could serve jail time for it.

When it comes to games, the matter is more confused. In any given game, the player owns the CD it comes on. However, the player doesn't own the game itself; the code belongs to the company that created it. Again, copyright law.

But who owns a player's creation inside a game? When a player spends months on end creating the perfect *EverQuest* character, does the character belong to Sony or to the player?

The short answer is, it belongs to Sony.

As noted, any MMORPG is as much a service as it is a product. In fact, most of the product itself never sees the player's hard drive; it is stored on the developer's servers. In essence, players are licensing the server time so that they can play the game.

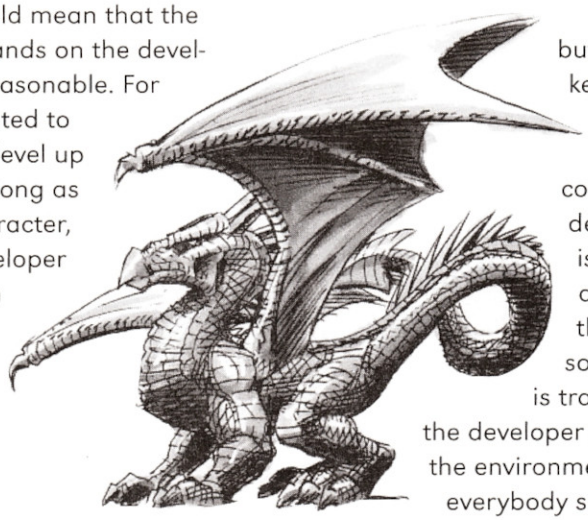
This scenario resembles a library model far more than a bookstore. The developer owns the game, and the players simply borrow bits of it. However, players don't just use preexisting parts of the game; they create something new. Considering the time and effort that players put into their characters, can it really be that cut-and-dried? Surely at least some of the character belongs to the player?

Sadly, as noble a thought as that is, it simply can't work in real life. The nature of the MMORPG makes it impossible for a player to own the character they are using. It isn't a matter of corporate greed, but rather a matter of responsibility.

As stated, unlike most games, the MMORPG exists primarily on the developer's servers. This means that the company that employs the developers is responsible for keeping up the game and ensuring that everybody is able to play without difficulties. What happens on the players' computers is their own problem; what happens on the MMORPG server is the game developer's responsibility.

So if a player owns the character they are using, this means that the developer is rendered both more responsible and powerless

at the same time. It would mean that the player could make demands on the developer that would be unreasonable. For example, if a player wanted to cheat and use hacks to level up his or her character, as long as the player owns the character, there is nothing the developer can do to stop this, even though the player is ruining the experience for everybody else. If the developer owns the character, however, the company can ban the account, protecting the rest of the community.



As soon as character ownership becomes an issue, other problems immediately become apparent. For example, what would happen if the entire game is to be shut down? Any players who own their characters and accounts could force the developer to keep the game running indefinitely, and at ruinous cost.

It is an odd thing, but responsibility is the key factor in it all. So long as the characters and accounts belong to the developer, the developer is responsible for them and can dictate how they are to be used. As soon as that ownership is transferred to the player, the developer can no longer control the environment on the server and everybody suffers. It is a strange result of the mercurial nature of the MMORPG, one that both denies ownership to the player but at the same time ensures a good playing experience.

"I imagine that since the genre is so new, there will be other issues that arise in the field," mused McQuaid, "certain assertions challenged—I imagine it's the birthing pains of what I think is going to turn into a huge

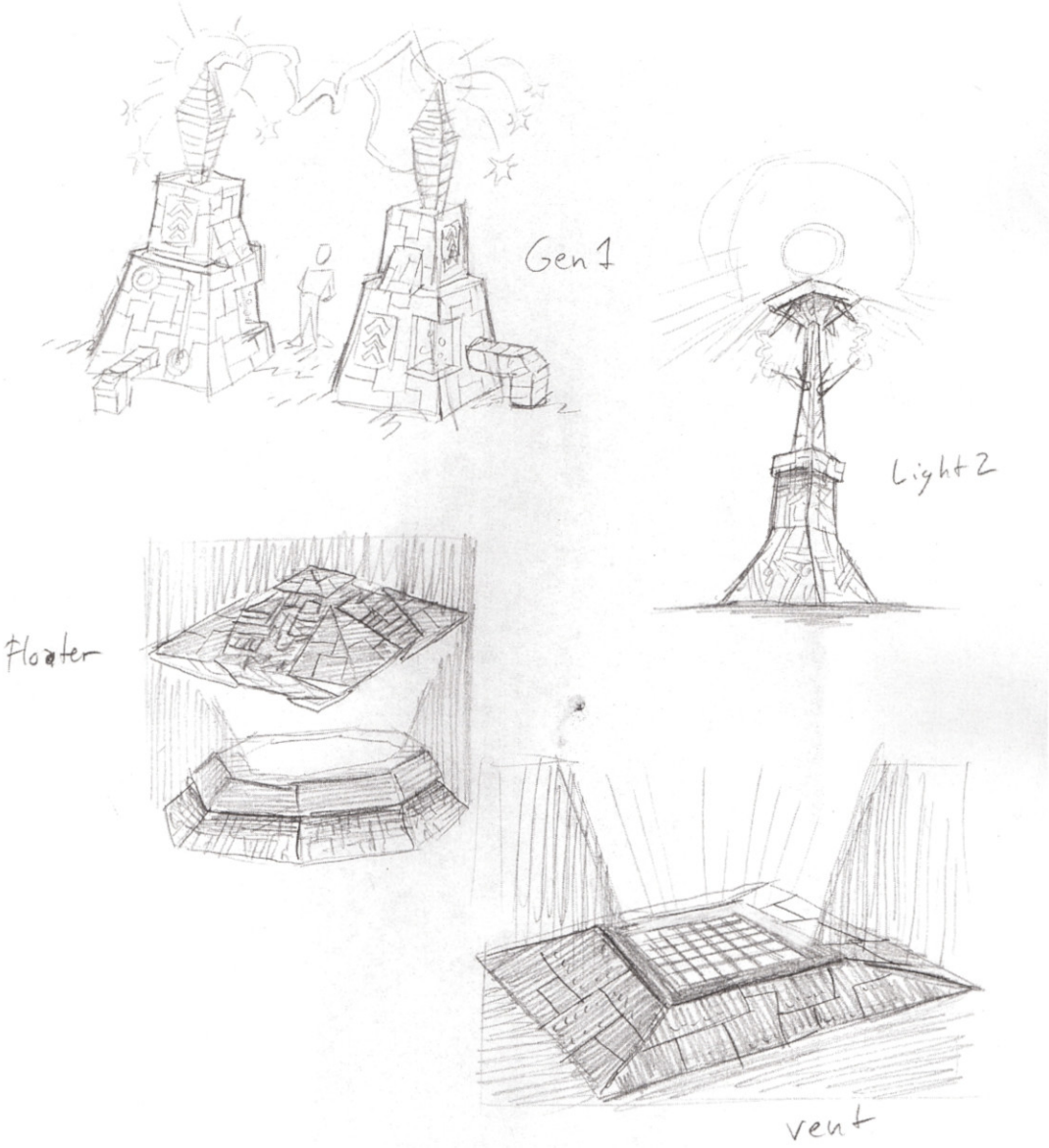
TALES FROM alt.games.everquest

Your first character is always your hardest. But after I leveled one character to 55, I started on my current favorite, a dark elf necro. I remembered taking an untwinked character to the Orc camps in EC and having my butt handed to me (13 wood elf warrior), but when a guildie (Klowdee, 10 troll shaman) asked me to come to Orc 2 and help her break the camp, I took my level 10 self over. As an INT caster, I usually have the armor class of goat cheese, and most level 10 casters are still wearing raw silk armor. I had twinked myself with an Oracle Robe, various loam pieces from drops in the Hole, and a couple of other nice things. Klowdee was her second troll too. So we didn't ask a higher level person to come break the camp for us, or shout for others to join in...we just zergling rushed the place. I ended up being the tank while my pet took one orc at a time and Klowdee took another. It was a great feeling of power to withstand all those blows.

—Tarre Soulskin

interactive entertainment industry, and where online gaming needs to go."

The range of computer games makes determining the basic nature of the game difficult. Single-player games have basic attributes that differ from massively multi-player games, while every single genre of game has its own unique features. The range becomes infinite as soon as you start looking at MMORPGs, which have to simulate entire worlds, and have to do it in such a way that the players keep coming back for more. It is sometimes easy to forget that the games that we all enjoy are truly complicated things at heart, especially when the game is something like *EverQuest*.



GOLD, ZONES, QUESTS, AND MONSTERS: TOURING THE DESIGN OF THE GAME WORLD

CHAPTER 5

...BUT IN A VIRTUAL REALITY, THE PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES ALL...ALL THE BLOOD, ALL THE GUTS, ALL THE TORN FLESH, THE TOTALITY OF THE ENCOUNTER — SIGHT, SMELL, TASTE, TOUCH, SOUND, KINESTHETICS — NO MATTER HOW HIDEOUS, NO MATTER HOW SWEET.

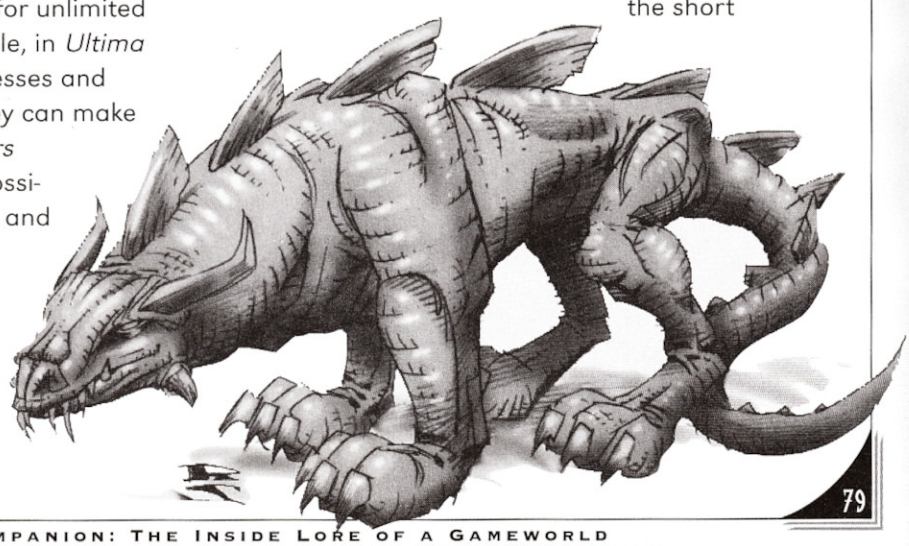
—DENNIS L. MCKIERNAN, CAVERNS OF SOCRATES

With their epic, grand scale, persistent worlds can present quite the problem to game designers: how do you keep people interested? After all, an MMORPG is as much of a service as it is a product—its survival depends on people playing and then continuing to play for months on end.

Designers can employ a number of different methods to make a game a lasting experience. One method is to allow for unlimited lateral development. For example, in *Ultima Online*, players can start businesses and own property. In *EverQuest*, they can make their own weapons. In *Star Wars Galaxies*, it will eventually be possible for players to own starships and travel from system to system.

One of the reasons that *EverQuest* has managed to retain players is that its model of gameplay has incorporated discovery into the game mechanics. The first part of the game involves a great deal of instant gratification; players are able to create and build characters quickly, with frequent level ups. This familiarizes the players with the game, giving them a character that can survive in the larger realm of Norrath.

If the entire experience of the game was like that, it would be an utter failure. Instant gratification is good for the short



term—but only for the short term. Something made quickly is not as highly valued as something that had to be worked for. The initial character does not have all of the skills that make for a great character; these take many hours of play to acquire. It is here that the gameplay model truly shines.

Any given skill takes a random number of attempts to advance in. This means that, like the dungeons of *Diablo*, the player will not be faced with the same things over and over again. The player will have a sense of achievement, even without knowing just how much effort is required to succeed. The sense of discovery is linked into every single skill.

Also, as in real life, players are able to work toward several goals at once. For example, a blacksmith could be forging an ultimate sword of power while trying to complete a quest that would allow her to afford the metal for the sword. This combination of discovery and intertwining goals means that anytime somebody logs into the game, they will find something interesting to do.

And *that* is the key. However, at the same time, there's so much more. A persistent world is never simple.

QUESTING AROUND

Quests serve a number of purposes. To a degree, they give shape to the game world, providing both new and veteran players with something to do. Early quests in *EverQuest* tend to revolve around putting together a decent set of equipment, which is absolutely vital for the adventures a player will participate in later on.

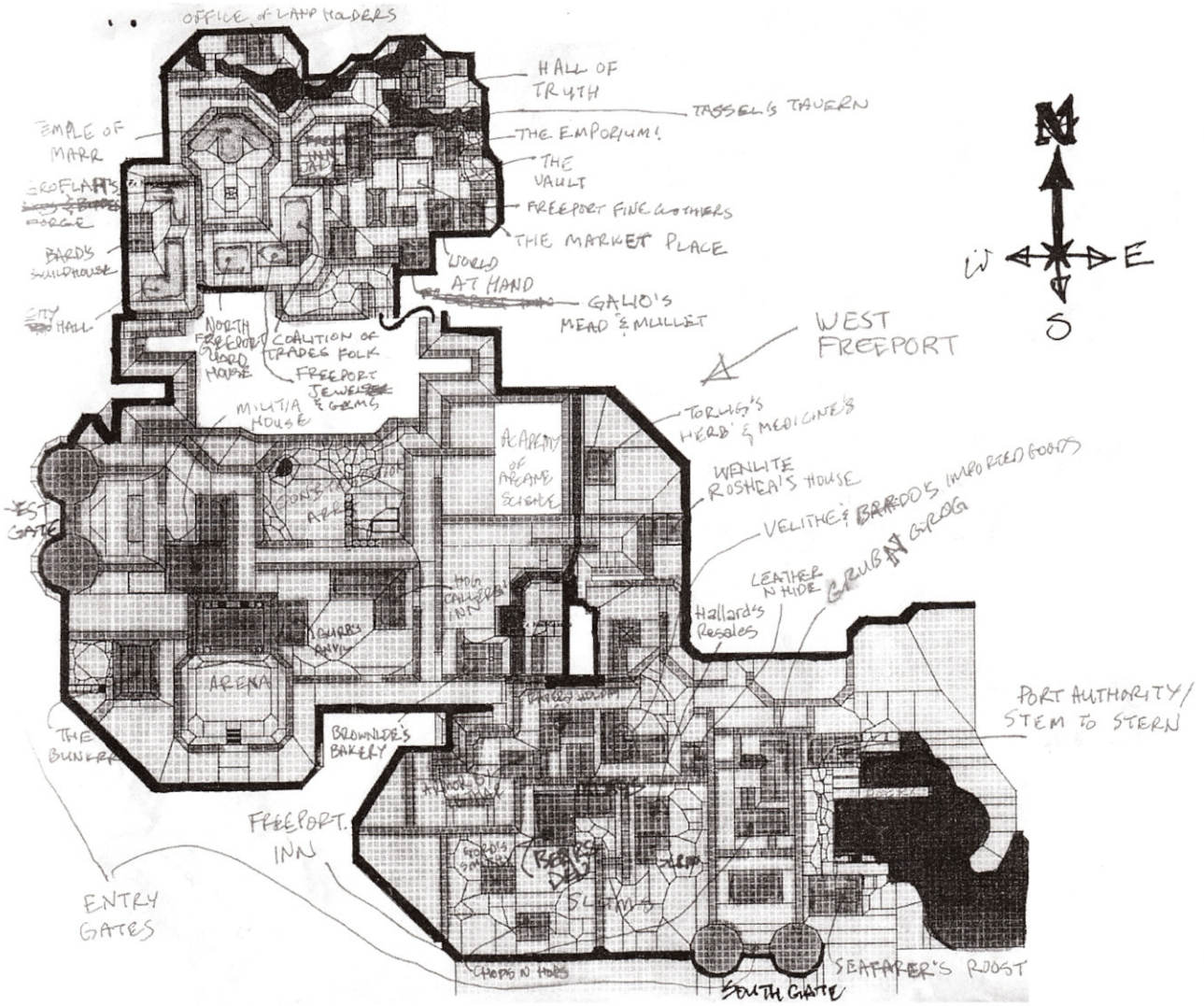
Quests can be problematic, however. If the only quests a player can embark upon are imposed by the game design, the player loses any control they might have over the environment—they become a spectator rather than a participant. On the other hand, give players no quests to do, and they quickly become bored. Put the quests solely in the hands of the Game Masters, and any player not online at the right time misses it.

Verant decided to use a combination of quest types to get around this dilemma. While some quests are built into the game, such as the Paladin quest in Freeport for a magical sword, others, known as *dynamic quests*, are placed in the hands of the Game Masters.

Dynamic quests are a type of event that can actually alter the world of Norrath. The quest is initiated by a Game Master, who plays a character running through scripted events. For example, the Game Master might be playing a courier who must be

CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY, VANN TRAN

Leaders of the *EverQuest Live* team. From left to right, Oliver Smith, Rich Waters, and Shawn Lord



The original map for West Freeport

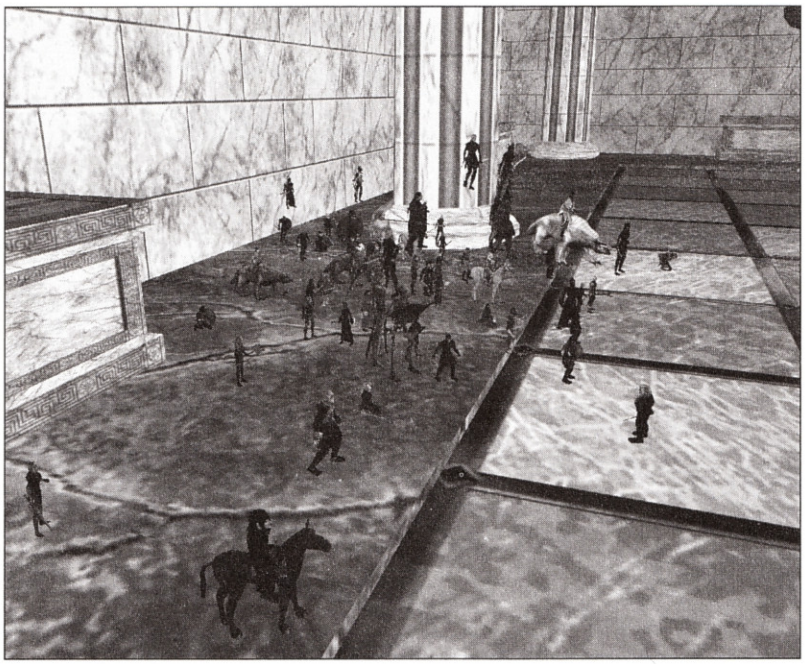
protected by the players on her way through Norrath—if somebody kills the courier, the quest fails and a city falls.

While some dynamic quests happen occasionally, others appear on a regular basis. On the continent of Velious, for example, a recurring quest is to hold back the invaders from a city in the Great Divide. If the invaders are not stopped, the city is empty for a set period of time.

A recent development in scripting, however, has made larger dynamic quests possible. For *The Planes of Power*, the *EverQuest* Live team designed a script that would allow events over several zones to be triggered by something as simple as talking to a non-player character (NPC). While this doesn't make the Game Masters running dynamic quests obsolete, it does expand the potential of the game—a player's actions in one zone can now affect scripted events several zones away.

Each built-in quest was designed for a specific period in a character's lifetime.

The early quests tend to involve making armor and motivating players to explore their surroundings (an example of this was used in Chapter 1). As players get past their first ten levels, they are able to deal with the world around them, and the quests take on a brand-new role. A story develops, and in some cases the story is affected by where the player is located (a Paladin in Freeport, for example, eventually ends up having to destroy the corrupt Freeport government).



A large group of players about to raid a dragon's lair

With numerous character types and various quests to go with each, many dependant on location, the designers had to ensure that the quests were balanced. After all, the last thing they wanted was to have the majority of players concentrate on one area of play while neglecting the rest of the world. To accomplish this, the designers have to check frequently to make certain that all the quests still work, a process they began when the game was first released.

"It was a challenge, because while treasure found in dungeons from adventuring there were under constant scrutiny, the rewards for in-game quests were difficult to keep balanced as the game aged," said Brad McQuaid. "We tried to visit all content periodically, especially after an expansion, to make sure it was still compelling."

The higher-level quests serve one final purpose in the game world: they reinforce the community nature of the game. While players can easily complete the first set of quests on their own, the difficulty of the quests increases far faster than the skills of the characters. This forces players to group together to complete quests and continue the story, rather than having several loners wandering around slaying dragons.

THE MULTI-PLAYER UNIVERSE

One aspect of the *EverQuest* experience that is obvious from the start is the multiplayer nature of the game. A look at any of the *EverQuest* web sites will reveal a complex community filled with guilds, many of which conduct massive assaults, or "raids," on dungeons. Indeed, in the here and now, the guild system has become almost essential to higher-level players, and raids are more famous than almost any other type of gameplay.

The original design, however, was not for a game that revolved around large-level assaults. Instead, the gameplay was originally designed to be a graphical MUD (Multi-User Dungeon) and was based on MUD principles. While it may have started out

that way, the group dynamic for a MUD community of a few hundred people is much different from the *EverQuest* group dynamic, which involves a few hundred thousand people. As the community organized itself, guilds became large enough to conduct large scale raids.

To this day, McQuaid denies that raids were planned for specifically. "Certainly there is raid content, but most players don't raid, even at higher levels, and the intent was to offer content at the higher end for all sorts of player types and their varying schedules and abilities to commit time to the game, especially in one contiguous chunk."

The entire game experience *was* designed to build a multiplayer community, however. Some elements of the design were quite subtle—for example, to help serious role-players find one another, the ability to mark yourself as a role-player was built into the engine, and any character who is role-playing has a purple name over their head rather than the usual cyan one.

Another element used to help increase contact between players was emoting, where a player can actually have his character wave or motion to another character. "I think it was evident very early on that the more animations the better," McQuaid said. "Despite being limited by memory requirements and the like, attaching these animations to socials and emotes turned out to be a great idea."

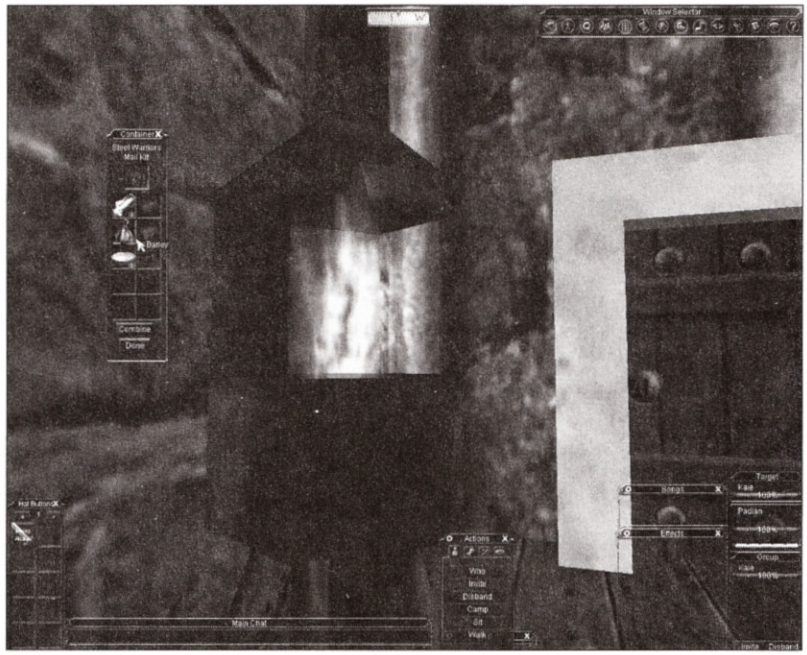
Emoting evolved, and continues to evolve, as the game engine became more and more advanced. For the yet-unreleased *EverQuest II*, for example, the team finally had the ability to add in all of the emotes they had wanted to include but couldn't with earlier versions, as the character avatars now have movable fingers.

The structure of the game was also made to bring players together. One problem that a large number of role-playing games face is that at higher levels, the characters become tanks—virtually nothing can take them down. The design team kept this in mind and used monster difficulties to get around it. Every monster has a difficulty rating, which can be revealed by examining it. However, as characters increase in skill, the scale of difficulty itself slides. For example, a level 1 character will find that a monster rated as an even fight will be an even fight, or perhaps even a bit easy. By level 20, a monster rated as an even fight will actually be tougher than the character and the fight may be even only if the character is fighting with at least two other people. As the manuals state, this is

Original concept art—a Shissar

because players are supposed to be grouping together as they reach higher levels, and thus it is assumed that a higher-level character won't be attacking a monster alone.

This effectively forces players to group together to survive in the higher levels. The NPCs in dungeons that hold treasure were also made more difficult than normal, placing characters in a situation for which they have to group together to get the treasure.



The forge interface, where players can improve their smithing skills through practice

Although it may sound odd, the one questing aspect that seems tailored to creating community, dynamic quests and events, is actually the one aspect that wasn't specifically put in place to help build the community. They weren't an afterthought, but instead something that would allow Sony to give something back to the community that had already formed.

THE NORRATHIAN ECONOMY

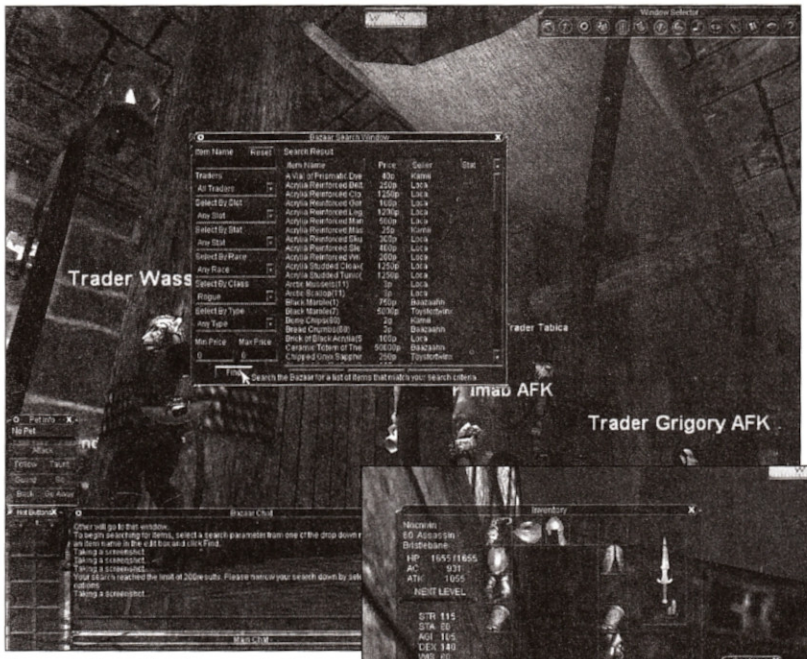
One of the most noticeable differences between the nature of an MMORPG and a regular computer game is that an actual economy exists inside the game. In fact, on January 28, 2002, *New Scientist* published a story stating that if the economy of Norrath was converted into actual currency, it would be the seventy-seventh richest nation in the world.

From the beginning, *EverQuest* was designed to support a player-driven economy. The original idea was to have the price of items dictated by the laws of supply and demand, while the rest of the game was strictly adventure-based. This changed as the designers noticed what was happening in *Ultima Online*, where players could make their own items, become merchants, or pursue other professions. When McQuaid and the design team noticed that not only was the system compelling, but it was also successful, the team decided to do something similar.

The trick was to take an adventure-based game and place trade skills into it, while avoiding having the skills swamp the adventure aspects. This was particularly challenging as character creation was based on classes—if any character could use any trade skill, then there was no point in having character classes at all.

The design team finally used two methods of implementing the trade skills. The first was to create places around the zones where players could "combine" items to create other items. For example, in the back of the Freeport Steel Warriors building is a forge where players can combine a mould

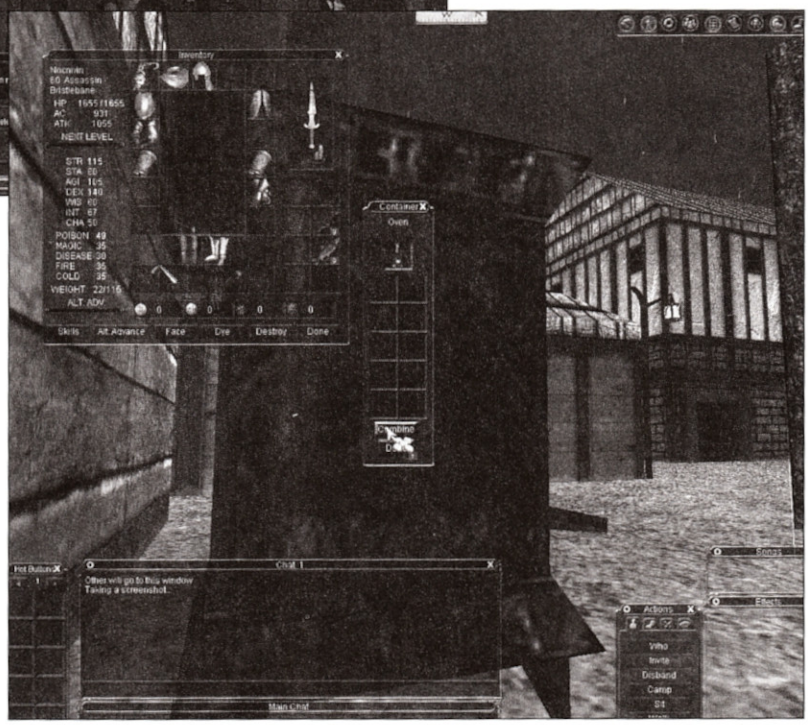
and materials into pieces of armor or weapons, thus increasing their blacksmithing skills. Portable containers were also created, where players could combine items, allowing them to practice their trade skills on the fly. This provided a simple but elegant solution to how to practice the skills that would allow custom items to enter the economy.



Players trading at the Bazaar on Luclin

The next problem was how to ensure that the trade skill system didn't undermine the class system. This was accomplished by associating certain trade skills with certain classes, and in some cases even restricting some trade skills to specific classes. This not only had the effect of enriching the class system and making each class more interesting, but it also made the classes more interdependent on each other.

At first, players found it easiest to create items and sell them to the NPC merchants, and then other players would be able to purchase the items from the merchant. This doesn't mean that players who had developed their trade skills couldn't sell directly to other players—indeed, a vibrant economy existed where exactly this happened. However, direct sales were relatively difficult to keep contained in the game. To sell their products directly, players would have to advertise on web sites and sometimes even auction their items for real money on eBay.


A character improving its trade skills by using an oven

For *The Shadows of Luclin*, the design team created a place called the "Bazaar." This was a section of Luclin that served two purposes: players could use it to venture to other cities on Norrath and Luclin, and player merchants could set up stalls and sell their items with a special trading interface that activated whenever a player stood inside a stall and marked themselves as a trader. This made it easier for players from all over Norrath to gather and trade their items, and at times more than 300 people are in the Bazaar at once.

CHOOSING SIDES

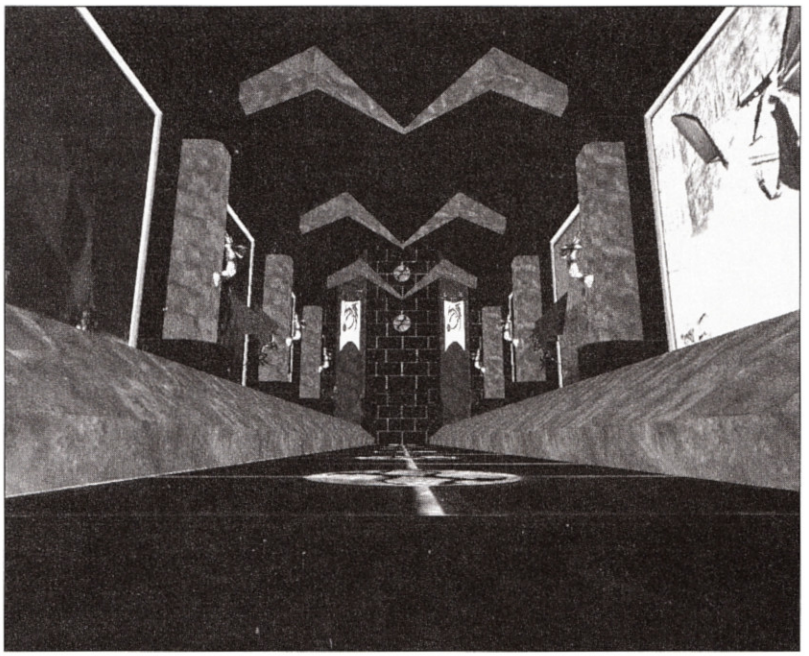
Sir Isaac Newton once wrote that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. A variation on this rule applies to every action taken in real life. Help a neighbor, and that person will be kindly disposed toward you. Cheat on your significant other, and it will affect your relationships between your family and friends.

Simulating this in a game world is not the easiest thing to do. After all, while hundreds of thousands of regular players may be enjoying the game, they are spread across several servers and certainly almost never all logged on at the same time. To expect news of one player's actions to get around quickly outside of message boards, especially when any player can have several characters on each server, is unrealistic at best.

Sony managed to get around this through *factions*. The faction system is dependent on actions. If, for example, you kill an Orc, some parts of Norrath will hate you for it while others will be more likely to look upon you favorably. The way that NPCs act can change dramatically through this faction system. Kill a certain creature, and the guards that would once let you pass will now try to kill you on sight.

The original reason for the faction system, as mentioned in a previous chapter, was that Bill Trost and Roger Uzun didn't like the simplicity of the original alignment system. The expanded system, based loosely on *Daggerfall*'s, allowed the design team to define a relationship between every different aspect of Norrathian culture, a system that worked so well that other computer role playing games, such as *Neverwinter Nights*, now use a similar system.

In *The Scars of Velious*, the faction system became a storytelling tool in its own right. The continent of Velious was divided into two groups, the giants and the dragons, each with its own faction.



The temple of Veeshan on Velious

"The desire was to use the faction system to an even greater degree," McQuaid recalled, "creating the dragon and giant factions to not only build upon *Velious*'s backstory, but also to provide more content and to spread people out. For example, some would choose to align themselves with the dragons, and others with the giants."

BUILDING A WORLD

While persistent worlds are a service, they are also a product of massive proportions. When McQuaid and Steve Clover sat down to create *EverQuest*, they were faced not just with creating a fantasy game, but with creating an entire world that players could explore at their leisure. This meant that they could not be content with just plot related scenery; they had to create a unique look and feel suggestive of an actual history for every area.

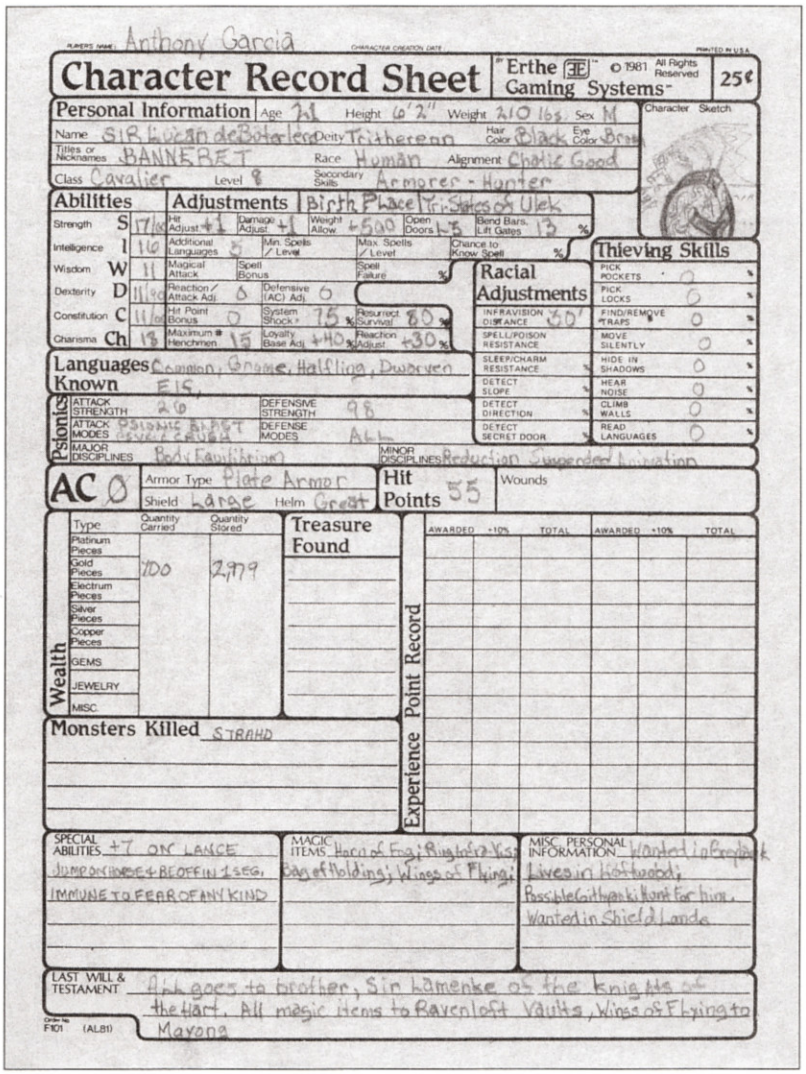
At least the development team could look toward a rich tapestry of material for inspiration. For example, the Dark Elves of Neriak belong to a tradition beginning in Scandinavian mythology and spreading into gaming and literature, first through Gary Gygax and later popularized by Robert A. Salvatore in his *Icewind Dale* trilogy. Each race drew its inspiration from a variety of sources, including traditional MUDs, pen-and-paper games, literature, and movies. In fact, Bill Trost, drawing on his experience as a pen-and-paper game master, had come to the decision at the beginning of the development process that the game would present objects and cultures that were familiar to the players.

"We draw our inspiration from everywhere; we're not ashamed of it, and we think that's one of our strengths," said Trost. "People can get into our game, and they understand what they're seeing."

Trost, however, couldn't resist adding some elements of his own. Years before,

```
Old Friends by Bill Trost

Fiorona Vai

AREA A:  Front Gate
    "The narrow path you have been following opens here into a small
clearing.  A feeling of sorrow pierces your soul as you see the gates of
what once must have been a proud elven community, now nothing but rusting
junk lying amid the bricks that once formed its support towers.  These two
towers are now no more than three stories of quarry stones.  To each side
of the towers, the city wall, or what's left of it, disappears into the
forest, which seems to have reclaimed the city for itself.  Beyond the
gates, amid sporadically spaced trees and thick underbrush, the ruins of
the city can be seen.  The air has grown thick and moist."

AREA B:  Left Tower
    1>  "Clamoring over the stones that once formed the wall of this tower,
you see a large earthen mound erupting through the floor covering the
entire southwest section of the room.  In the northern section, along the
wall, is a broken weapons rack with its former contents, various swords and
polearms, scattered about the floor.  Just to the left of the rack, on the
wall is a tattered portrait of three adventurers, an elf in chainmail, a
dwarf in full platemail and a human in full plate armor.  The elf and human
each are brandishing glowing longswords while the dwarf holds aloft a
mighty, glowing war hammer.  Just beyond the earthen mound a stairway can
be seen ascending along the contour of the curved wall."
------UNLESS THE PARTY DISTURBS THEIR NEST THE ANTS WILL NOT ATTACK
MONSTER:
Ant, Giant (x156); AC: 3; MV:18; HD:2d8; HP:12(x47), 10(x88),
11(x21);  #AT:1; DMG:1d6; SA:None; SD:None; MR:Standard;
INT:Animal; AL:Neutral; SIZE:Small; THAC0:16;
TREAS: None;
EXP:44(x47), 40(x88), 42(x21)
Total EXP:6470

Ant, Giant Warrior (x31); AC: 3; MV:18; HD:3d8; HP:16(x3),
15(x9), 10(x9), 19(x6), 14(x4);  #AT:2; DMG:2d4, 3d4; SA:See
below; SD:None; MR:Standard; INT:Animal; AL:Neutral; SIZE:Small; THAC0:16
If mandibles hit, attempt sting (3-12, if save made 1-4)
TREAS: None;
 EXP:88(x3), 85(x9), 70(x9), 97(x6), 82(x4)
 Total EXP:2569
LAIR TREAS: 6 Gems, all red 20GP each; 2 Potions, both red X-tra Healing
------THERE IS A SECRET TRAP DOOR TO A PASSAGE TO AREA C.1 or F.1

    2>"The door appears to be stuck.  A loud cry bursts from the other side
of the door."
------OPEN DOORS ROLL REQUIRED TO OPEN THE DOOR
    "The crying has gotten louder and seems to be coming from beyond a pile
of stones that form a barrier to the northeast.  Another such wall is to
the northwest."

    3>"There is very little of interest in this chamber whose walls were
formed by the collapsed ceiling.  That is little of interest except for the
```

A page from Bill Trost's original campaign



PLAYER'S NAME: Anthony Garcia

CHARACTER CREATION DATE:

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

Character Record Sheet

Erthe Gaming Systems™ © 1981 All Rights Reserved 25¢

Personal Information

Age 71 Height 6'2" Weight 210 lbs. Sex M

Name SIR Lucan deBoterlere Deity Tritherenn Hair Color Black Eye Color Brown

Titles or Nicknames BANNERET Race Human Alignment Chaotic Good

Class Cavalier Level 8 Secondary Skills Armorer - Hunter

Character Sketch

Abilities | **Adjustments** | Birth Place Tri-States of Ulek

		Hit Adjust.	Damage Adjust.	Weight Allow.	Open Doors	Bend Bars, Lift Gates
Strength S	17/85	+1	+1	+500	1-5	13 %
Intelligence I	16	Additional Languages 5	Min. Spells / Level	Max. Spells / Level	Chance to Know Spell %	
Wisdom W	11	Magical Attack Adj.	Spell Bonus	Spell Failure %		
Dexterity D	11/90	Reaction / Attack Adj. 0	Defensive (AC) Adj. 0			
Constitution C	11/95	Hit Point Bonus 0	System Shock 75 %	Resurrect Survival 80 %		
Charisma Ch	18	Maximum Henchmen 15	Loyalty Base Adj. +40 %	Reaction Adjust. +30 %		

Racial Adjustments

INFRAVISION DISTANCE	60'
SPELL/POISON RESISTANCE	%
SLEEP/CHARM RESISTANCE	%
DETECT SLOPE	%
DETECT DIRECTION	%
DETECT SECRET DOOR	%

Thieving Skills

PICK POCKETS	0 %
PICK LOCKS	0 %
FIND/REMOVE TRAPS	0 %
MOVE SILENTLY	0 %
HIDE IN SHADOWS	0 %
HEAR NOISE	0 %
CLIMB WALLS	0 %
READ LANGUAGES	0 %

Languages Known Common, Gnome, Halfling, Dwarven, Elf,

Psionics

ATTACK STRENGTH 20 DEFENSIVE STRENGTH 98

ATTACK MODES Psionic Blast DEFENSE MODES All

MAJOR DISCIPLINES Body Equilibration MINOR DISCIPLINES Reduction Suspended Animation

AC 0 Armor Type Plate Armor Shield Large Helm Great

Hit Points 55 Wounds

Wealth

Type	Quantity Carried	Quantity Stored
Platinum Pieces		
Gold Pieces	100	2,979
Electrum Pieces		
Silver Pieces		
Copper Pieces		
GEMS		
JEWELRY		
MISC.		

Treasure Found

Experience Point Record

	AWARDED	+10%	TOTAL	AWARDED	+10%	TOTAL

Monsters Killed STRAHD

SPECIAL ABILITIES +7 ON LANCE JUMP OVER 4 BEOFFIN 1 SEG, IMMUNE TO FEAR OF ANY KIND

MAGIC ITEMS Hero of Erig; Ring of Yes; Bag of Holding; Wings of Flying;

MISC. PERSONAL INFORMATION Wanted in Freeport Lives in Kelthwood; Possible Gith ambassador for hire. Wanted in Shield Lands

LAST WILL & TESTAMENT Ash goes to brother, Sir Lamenke of the Knights of the Hart. All magic items to Ravenloft Vaults, Wings of Flying to Mayong

Order No. F101 (AL81)

The character sheet of Sir Lucan deBoterlere, who would later become Lucan D'lere

"After we stopped playing about five or six years ago, my buddies and I started writing stories and sending them around," Trost recalled. "This was the ultimate way of keeping the campaign alive."

Although Trost included his own contributions of references and in-jokes, much of the content was designed by other artists and designers, many of whom put their personal references into the game. The end result was a multi-layered game, with references upon references that could be spotted by alert players. For example, Karg Icebear and his bear, Iceberg, were based on Yukon Cornelius and the Bumble from the '60s film *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*.

"If people notice it and get the connection, it's cool," Trost said. "There's a subset of people who will get mad and think that it's breaking their reality somehow. But I think he had run a *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign, and he had been trying ever since to resurrect elements of that campaign. Characters and places from his original map were translated into the world of *EverQuest*. Lucan D'lere, the main villain from Freeport, was the character that Tony Garcia, Trost's lead content designer, had run in Trost's campaign. Even things that did not have a direct translation, such as Firiona Vie, a place name from Trost's campaign, appeared in the game as characters.

FAVORITE SHOP

"My favorite shop is probably Fish's Tavern in Qeynos. It was one of the first areas where I put some NPC's who did more than stand around and wait to die. They had cool little stories and talked to each other and everything. That Trumpy Irontoe is SUCH a JERK though!"

—Bill Trost

The treetop city of Kelethin

most people enjoy that, when they recognize it."

The development team made certain that each race had its own unique style. The process was twofold: First the design team as a whole brainstormed about what each race would be like. Then the race was handed over to a specific designer or a group of designers, who had to create the artistic style and history.

In some cases, the development team decided to go slightly counter-tradition. The Barbarians in Halas were based on the Scots instead of the Norse, up to and including identifiable Scottish names and tartan kilts. This was done to make the race a bit different from traditional fantasy but still recognizable to players.

In other cases, the challenge of creating a visual effect had an immense impact on a player race. Kelethin, the city of the Wood Elves, for example, is a metropolis high in the treetops, accessible only via gigantic elevators. The basic idea had appeared frequently in fantasy fiction, most notably the city of Lothlórien in *The Lord of the Rings* (although that was without elevators, among other things). McQuaid and his team, however, had never seen it attempted in a 3D game, and decided that they wanted to see if they could manage it.

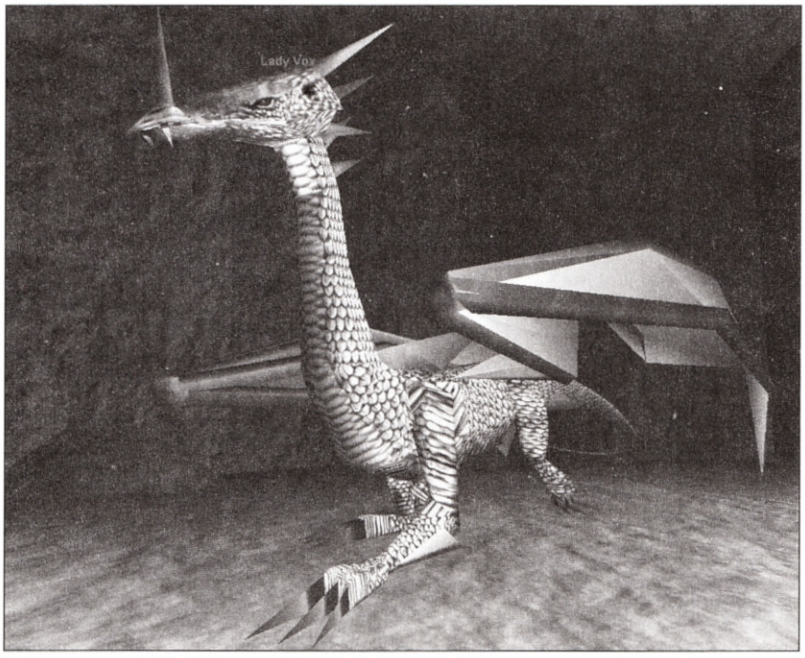
"We weren't sure we could do it, that the game's engine would support it, but that never really stopped us in the past, so we tried it," McQuaid recalled. "All in all, it's an incredible sight and was very impressive to players, but [it's] also a maze and a place both easy to get lost in, and easy to fall from to a newbie's death."

Sometimes the primary goal of a zone was to create an emotional effect. The Paludal Caverns of Luclin, for example, was

a dark area with damp caves and hidden bandit camps. The intention behind this creation was a frighteningly eerie cave system for the players to explore.

In other cases, the basic design drew heavily on what had been done before in MUDs and older RPGs. In *EverQuest*, certain races have their own languages, which they can speak without characters from other races being able to understand them. This was an application of principles that had existed since the beginning of role-playing, when Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson first created the player race rules for *Dungeons & Dragons*.

Once the races were designed, the development team had to decide how they were going to be played in the game. This meant that they had to give each race its associated character classes and skills. The team found itself performing a balancing act, trying to ensure that no one race was more desirable than another.



Lady Vox

"We wanted to make each race attractive, and to make those races we feared might be less attractive more appealing by giving them special abilities," said McQuaid. "Which classes a race could be came from both the desire to make that race compelling to play and also what we thought made sense from a role playing standpoint—for example, a Troll Paladin obviously doesn't make sense."

The monsters also needed some thought. While many of the creatures were essentially there just for the players to slaughter and gain experience, others had a place in the overall story arc. For example, Lady Vox, the dragon that marks the end of the original *EverQuest* game, was part of a larger plotline involving the Ring of Scale, the council of renegade dragons that broke faith with Veeshan and left Velious for Kunark. Her storyline was continued in *The Scars of Velious* and influenced zones such as the Temple of Veeshan, which is filled with dragons.

Once the world, the player races, their cultures, and their character classes were developed, the players had to be taken into account. Player-killing had been a part of online gaming from the beginning, and *EverQuest* needed to ensure that both casual players and player-killers were satisfied with the game experience. This was one case where the final product differed from the original design.

Initially, *EverQuest* had what was known as a "PK Switch." Both player-killers and casual players would exist in the same world,

and those who did not want to participate in player-versus-player (or PvP) action could simply turn the switch off so there was nothing a player-killer could do to hurt them.

"The 'PK Switch' became a very popular idea and brought many people to the game, especially those who didn't like the way *EverQuest*'s competitors handled PvP," said McQuaid. "It became evident in beta that the actual implementation could be better. Then, when it became more evident that EQ would be a huge success, with many servers at launch and even more to be added later, the idea came up to just create PvP and non-PvP servers. This turned out to work much better than the 'Switch,' even though the game was never designed with PvP as a priority."

Regardless of the races, their design, and how player-killing is handled, the game world itself had to be interesting. This meant that it had to be a living, breathing world. Verant quickly discovered that it was not enough to put the world in front of the players—they had to actively expand it.

EXPANDING A WORLD

As the player base expanded and the game became more successful than the development team had ever imagined, the design team realized a growing demand for new content—also, the new content was necessary to keep the game current and alive. Norrath had to evolve continually, lest it become stale and uninteresting.

The most noticeable way in which the new content was added was by releasing expansions. As far as the development team

FAVORITE ZONE

"From a personal involvement standpoint, it would either be Kelethin or EverFrost Peaks. Kelethin is cool because nobody thought it could be done, and it hadn't really been done before: a huge, elf village built into massive trees, all connected by bridges and the like.

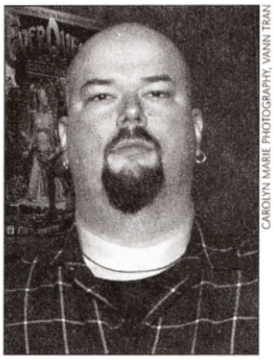
"But I think I'm even more fond of Everfrost Peaks because of all EQ zones, I was the most involved in its design from an art standpoint. I really worked with Scott McDaniel on this one, and came up with the idea of iced over rivers that would be accessible via small holes in the surface, and then players could swim under the ice and perhaps find some pretty exotic locals (that, or drown!). Scott wasn't sure if making ice on top of water would even work, or look right, but he pulled it off very well. I was also involved in writing up the storyline of the giants and how they were cursed long ago by the gods...

"The area that's now EverFrost Peaks was once a great Giant empire until it was cursed and the climate changed such that snow and ice covered the lands. So the zone has history, including the remnants of this empire with all of the ruins and such. Lastly, I was finally able to put Miragul into that zone (the story of Miragul being my creation)—I'd originally designed a zone specifically for Miragul, but when we never got to that, we put him into EverFrost, which was cool."

—Brad McQuaid

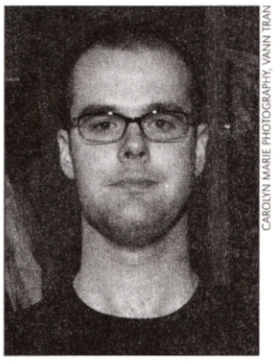
was concerned, each expansion had to accomplish two things: First, it had to keep the current players interested by providing new content. Second, it had to keep the game on the shelves and in the mind of the public—so long as a new *EverQuest* expansion appeared on the shelves every year or so, new players would become aware of it and the player base would continue to grow.

The task of keeping the content updated fell to the *EverQuest* Live team, a group of *EverQuest* players recruited first from customer service. Now headed by Rich Waters, the team had to do a careful balancing act. Not only did each area have to remain balanced for the players, but it also had to have something new and interesting. For expansions, this involved working with every part of the design team for each expansion, from programmers to zone builders to artists.



CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY, VANN TRAN

Rich Waters



CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY, VANN TRAN

Shawn Lord

"For every expansion, we have to sit down and look at the overall state of the world and figure out what the most pertinent points to focus on are," said Shawn Lord, the lead designer for expansions on the *EverQuest* Live team, who is currently working on a sixth expansion, *The Lost Dungeons of Norrath*. "Around six months ahead of the delivery date, we have to work out what would be the most healthy set of changes and work toward that goal."

The challenges the *EverQuest* Live team face on a day-to-day basis are diverse. While one part of the team is designing expansions, another is managing the *EverQuest* Legends server, and yet another is paying close attention to what is happening in the game world and adjusting it accordingly. If the game isn't maintained, it would quickly become stale and too easy—with constant adjustment, however, the game remains fresh and new, with something interesting going on every day.

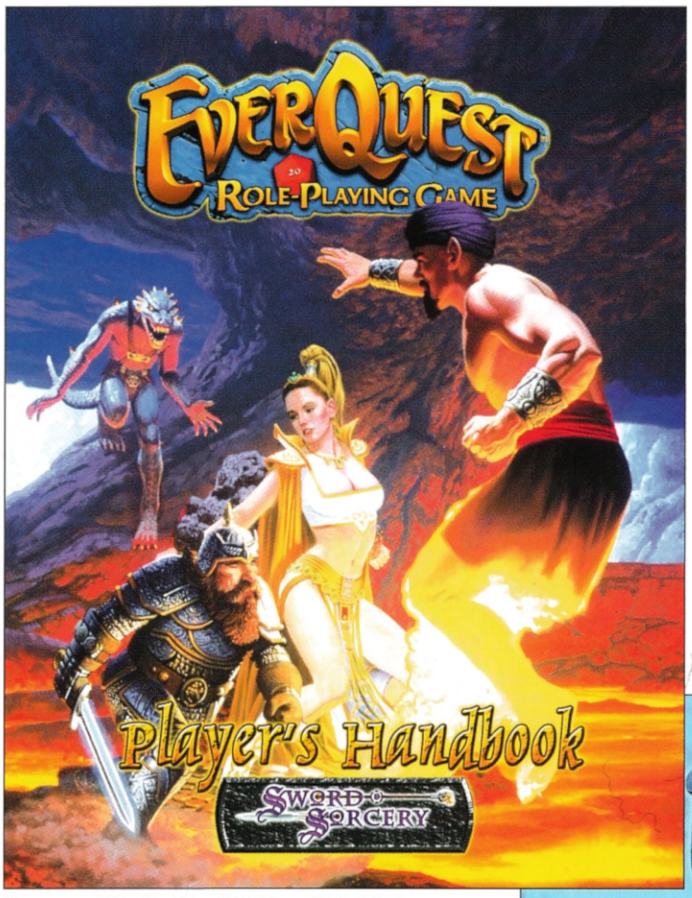
"We've got to look at what the game needs in the mid-term," Lord said. "We consider the long-term, look at the mid-term, and then we look at what needs to get out right away. If all of a sudden we know that the high-end content is lacking, and we need high-level zones, then we can coordinate between the teams and go, 'Alright, the next Live zone that we release is going to be super high-end.'"

The new content also has to take the player population into consideration. With a player base as large as *EverQuest*'s, numerous styles of play must be considered, from the most frantic to straight socializing. This involves a delicate balancing act that can often be stressful on the team members.

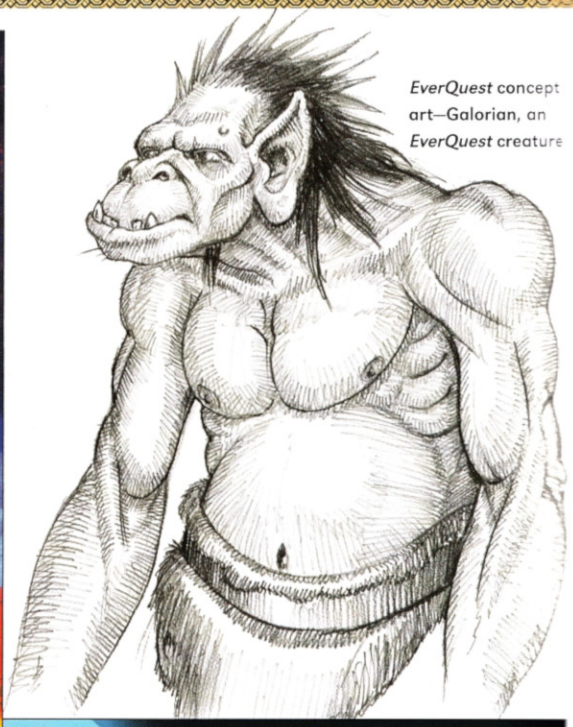
"In some ways it can be a bit disheartening," said Waters, "just to see that there's all these people you want to entertain and make happy—but anything you do is maybe going to make half of them happy and the other half is going to be mad about something. Some people would like to have less resting time; they fight a monster, be at full health again, and fight another monster with nothing in between. But if you make a change like that, you also find that there's a whole bunch of people who do their housework while they're playing *EverQuest*—they look at their screen every 30 seconds, and then go back to folding some clothes, and

EverQuest II concept art—
The Grand Hallway of Truth

An armored skeleton—the *EverQuest II* graphics engine

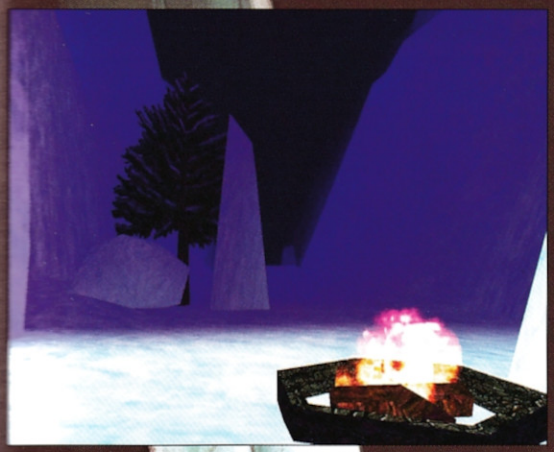


The cover of the *EverQuest* RPG from White Wolf



EverQuest concept art—Galorian, an *EverQuest* creature

The Game Master's Guide of the *EverQuest* RPG from White Wo



EverFrost—the *EverQuest* graphics engine at final release

Galorian rendered in the *EverQuest* engine

The *EverQuest* graphics engine after being updated for *Shadows of Luclin*

EverQuest II concept art from E3—an Iskar

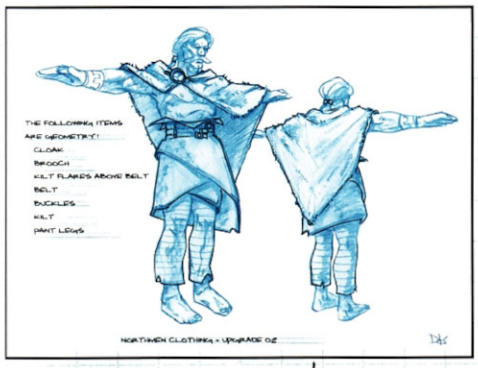
EverQuest
concept art

Troll

Dwarves

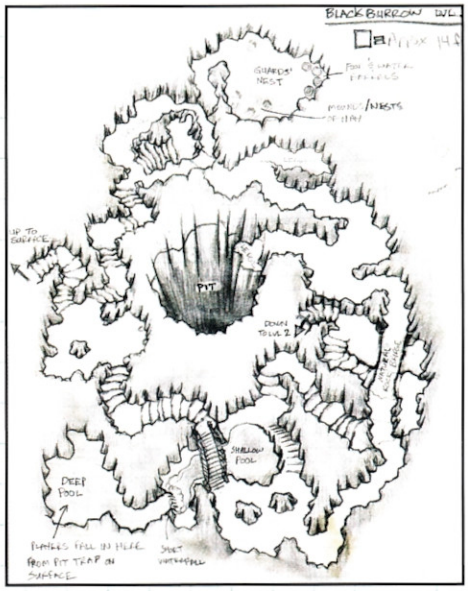
ogre

Trolls being created in one of
EverQuest's development tools

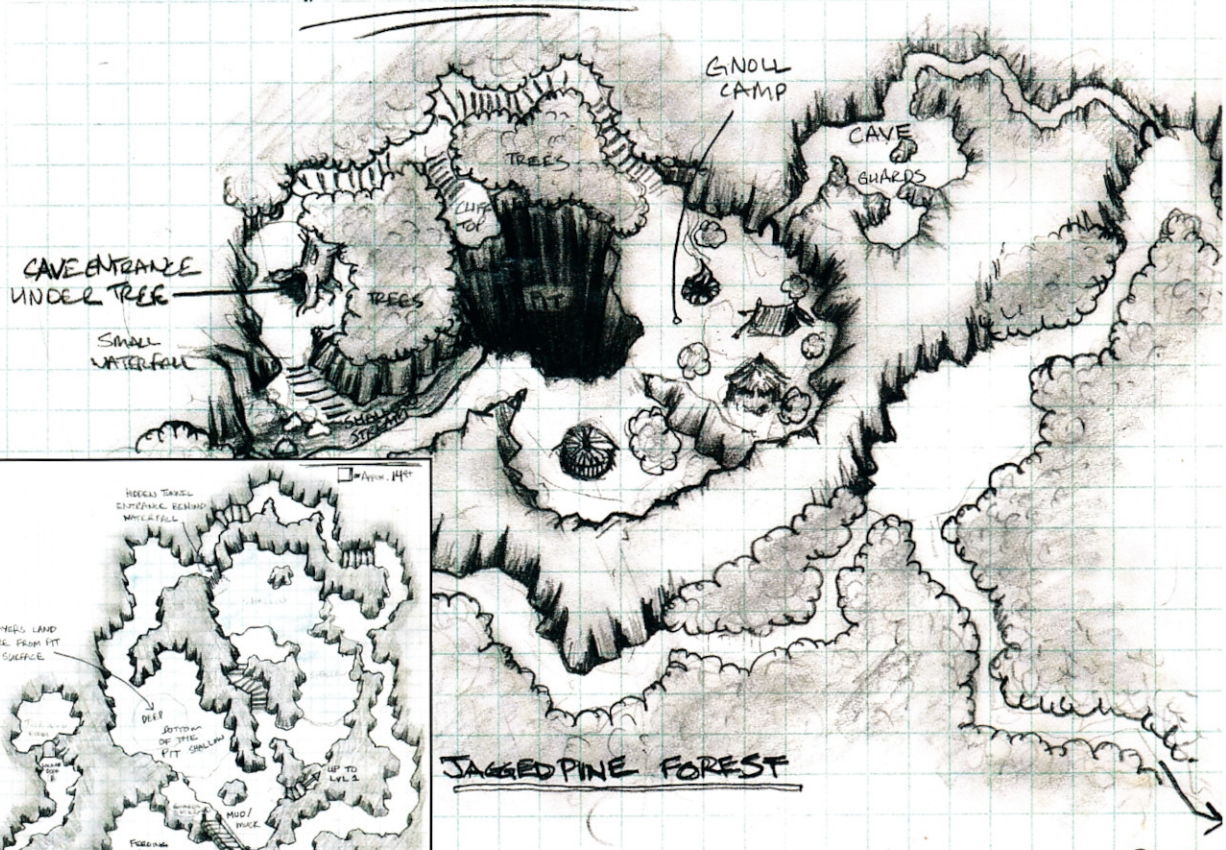


EverQuest II concept art—Northmen clothing

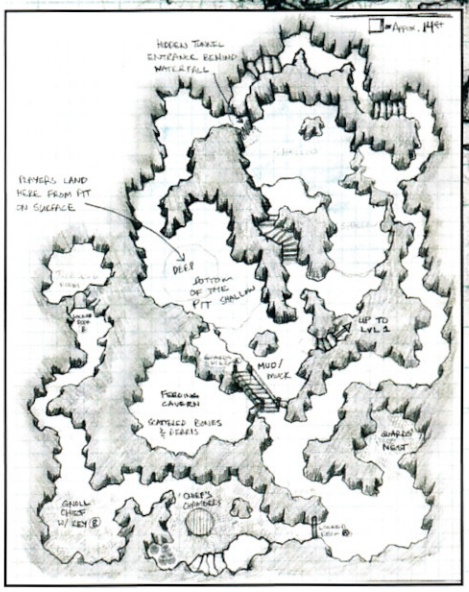
Another level of Blackburrow



SABERTOOTHS of BLACKBURROW



Blackburrow, part of Bill Trost's original D&D campaign



The second level of Blackburrow

Sony's trophy case, including original *EverQuest* box art and awards

Steve Clover and Brad McQuaid, the co-designers of the original design document. Both were with the game until 2002, when they left to form Sigil.

CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY; VANN TRAN

Key members of the *EverQuest* design team. From left to right: Andy Sites, John Blakely, Bill Trost, and Roger Uzun

CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY; VANN TRAN

John Smedley, the head of Sony Online, who has been with *EverQuest* since day one and remains the guiding hand behind the game.

Brad McQuaid. Along with Steve Clover, he drew up the original design document.

CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY; VANN TRAN

Bill Trost. Not only did he develop the faction system, but also many elements of the original game were based on his *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign.

Sony Online

CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY; VANN TRAN

Eric Webster, a game designer, placing objects in an *EverQuest II* zone

CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY; VANN TRAN

Members of the *EverQuest* Live team. From left to right: Oliver Smith, Rich Waters, and Shawn Lord

Vendors selling arms and armor at the San Diego Fan Faire

The concept art board

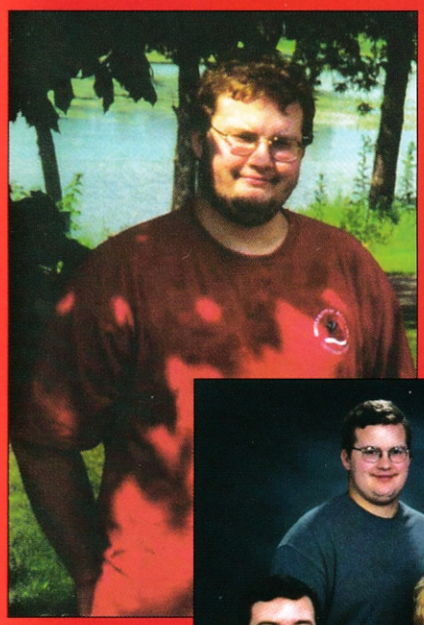
The *EverQuest Atlas*—one of Sony's support products

The true form of *EverQuest*—one of Sony's server rooms

A panel at the Las Vegas Fan Faire

Costumed fans pose at the San Diego Fan Faire

Nicholas Yee, one of the first people to do a comprehensive study on the *EverQuest* player population



Shawn Wooley, the young man who shot himself while playing *EverQuest*

Shawn Wooley's family. His mother, Liz Wooley (lower center) turned her grief into something positive by becoming a helping hand for those recovering from online game addiction.

EverQuest Hero's Call played on a phone

EverQuest outside the computer in the most aggressive way possible—a battlebot

CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY, VANN TRAN

An orc and human fight—the *EverQuest II* graphics engine

PLAYER'S NAME: Anthony Garcia CHARACTER CREATION DATE:

Character Record Sheet

by Erthe Gaming Systems

Personal Information Age 21 Height 6'2" Weight 210 lbs Sex

Name SIR Lucan deBoterlere Deity Trithereon Hair Color Black Eye Color

Titles or Nicknames BANNERET Race Human Alignment Chaotic Good

Class Cavalier Level 8 Secondary Skills Armorer - Hunter

Abilities | **Adjustments** | Birth Place: Freeport, Qeynos or Ulek

		Hit Adjust.	Damage Adjust.	Weight Allow.	Open Doors	Bend Bars, Lift Gates
Strength	S	+1	+1	300	5	13 %
Intelligence	I	Additional Languages	Min. Spells / Level	Max. Spells / Level	Chance to Know Spell	%
Wisdom	W	10				
Dexterity	D	Magical Attack	Spell Bonus	Spell Failure	%	
Constitution	C	13				
Charisma	Ch	Reaction / Attack Adj.	Defensive (AC) Adj.			
		0	0			
		Hit Point Bonus	System Shock %	Resurrect Survival %		
		18	75	80		
		Maximum # Henchmen	Loyalty Base Adj.	Reaction Adjust. %		
		5	+10	+30		

Racial Adjustments

INFRAVISION DISTANCE	
SPELL/POISON RESISTANCE	
SLEEP/CHARM RESISTANCE	
DETECT SLOPE	
DETECT DIRECTION	
DETECT SECRET DOOR	

Languages Known Common, Qeynos, Halfling, Dwarven, Elf

Psionics

ATTACK STRENGTH	26	DEFENSIVE STRENGTH	98
ATTACK MODES		DEFENSE MODES	
MAJOR DISCIPLINES		MINOR DISCIPLINES	

AC 0 Armor Type Plate Armor Shield Large Helm Great **Hit Points** 55 Wounds

Type	Quantity Carried	Quantity Stored
Platinum Pieces		
Gold Pieces	100	2,179
Electrum Pieces		

Treasure Found

Experience Point Record

	AWARDED	+10%	TOTAL

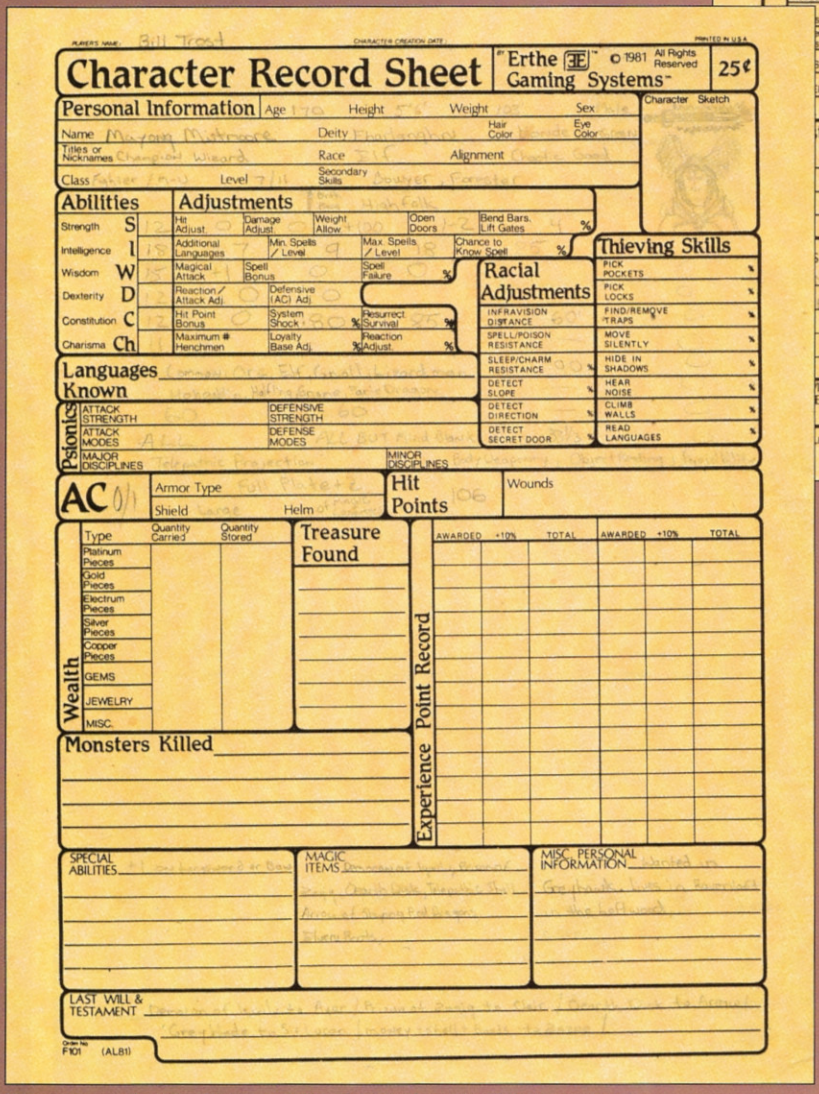
Monsters Killed STRAUD

+7 ORC LANCE

MAGIC ITEMS Horse of Fast Running, Bag of Holding, Wings of Flying

MISC. PERSONAL INFORMATION Lives in Boosted Wanted

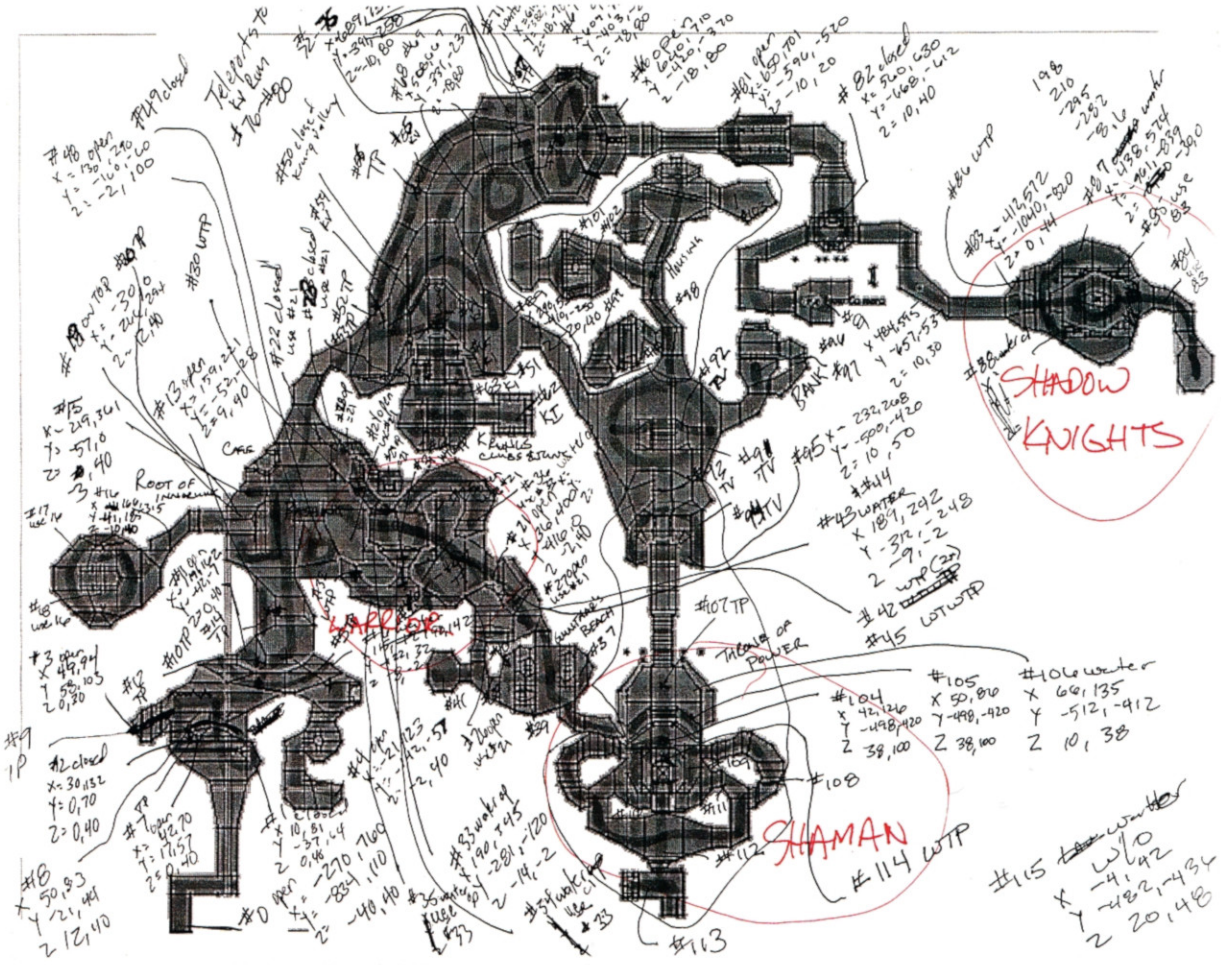
LAST WILL & TESTAMENT All pages to brother, Sir Lomenke of the Hart. All magic items to Ravenlost Vaults. Mayona



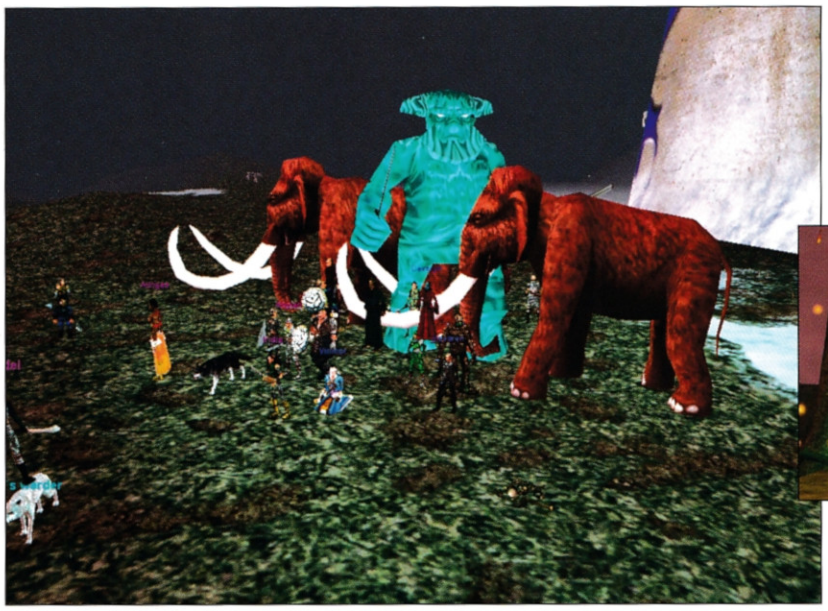
The character sheet for Sir Lucan deBoterlere, Anthony Garcia's character who would later become the head of the Freeport Militia in *EverQuest*

An orc attack—the *EverQuest II* graphics engine

Lords of EverQuest
concept art—a dark elf



The original Grobb, from Bill Trost's D&D campaign



Screenshot from *EverQuest Online Adventures*—one of the first attempts to bring the massively multiplayer experience to the game console

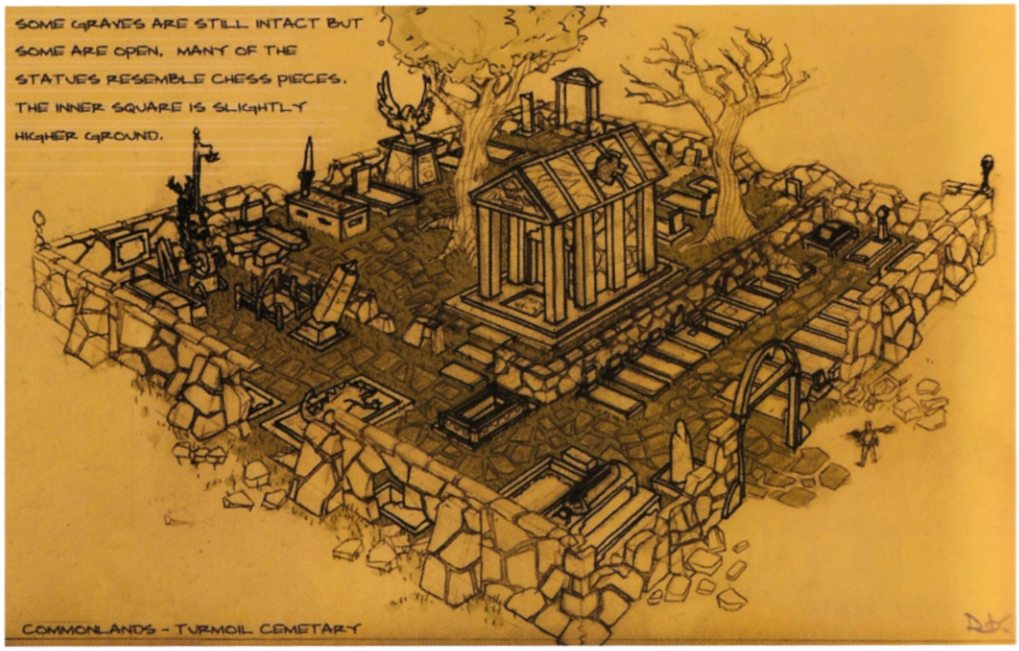
A Christmas party on one of the servers

EverQuest concept art

The Seekers of Lore guild on Veesham

EverQuest concept art—the Iskar on Kunark

EverQuest II concept art—the Turmoil Cemetery in the Commonlands


SOME GRAVES ARE STILL INTACT BUT SOME ARE OPEN. MANY OF THE STATUES RESEMBLE CHESS PIECES. THE INNER SQUARE IS SLIGHTLY HIGHER GROUND.
COMMONLANDS - TURMOIL CEMETARY

EverQuest II concept art from E3—Rivervale

Lords of EverQuest, an army gathers

Lords of EverQuest, a large city

Lords of EverQuest concept art—BlackFireSpire

A screenshot from the *EverQuest* Pocket PC game

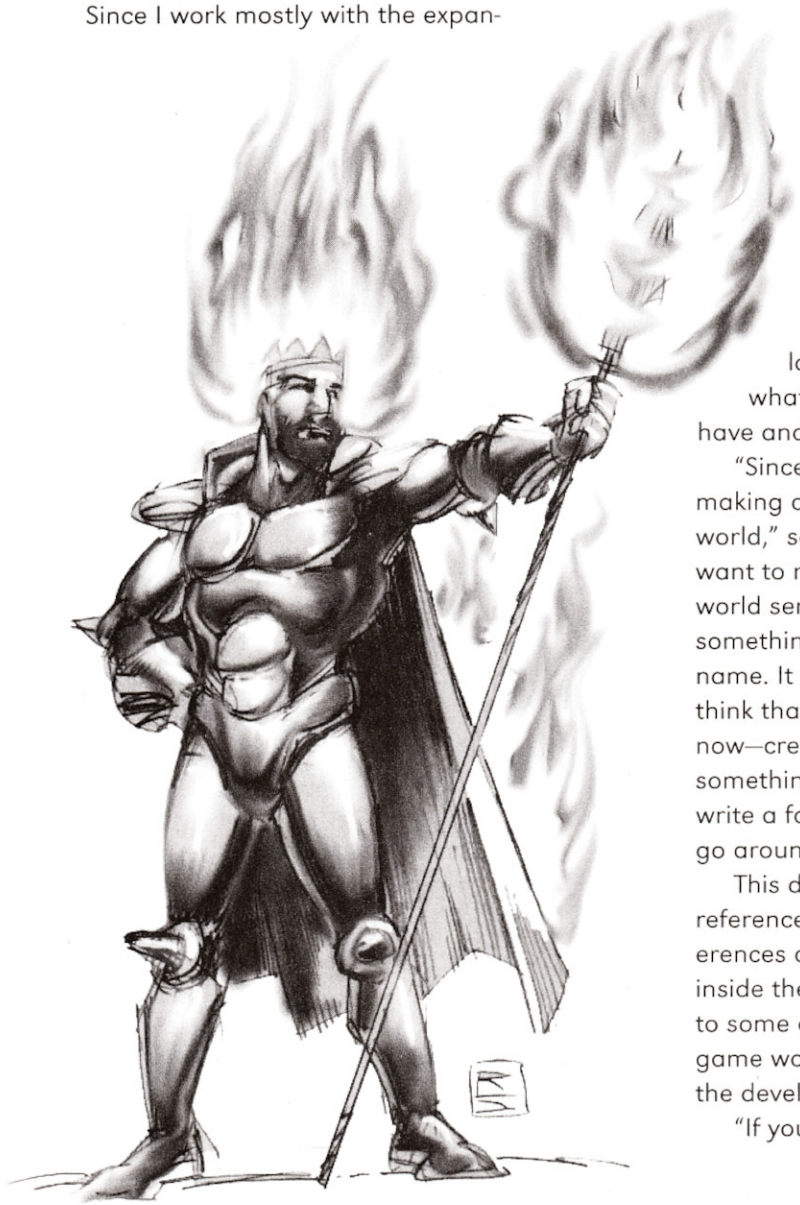
EverQuest II concept art—Rivervale

have their interactions that way."

One thing that assists the team in play balancing is the fact that all of them still have current *EverQuest* characters. This allows them to test the new zones with their guilds and through hands-on experience to find out just how well the new content works.

"I still try to spend as much time as possible raiding with my guild, looking at the new content, and getting a lot of feedback" said Lord. "Since my guild doesn't know who I am, it's much easier for me to get feedback. Since I work mostly with the expansions and the newer zones, it's good to be able to see where the breaking point is, what works and what doesn't."

As the new blood in the *EverQuest* Live team took on the responsibility for balancing the game and designing new levels for upcoming expansions, they brought a new design philosophy to the game. The original design team had included numerous in-jokes and references to the design. The *EverQuest* Live team, however, wanted nothing to do with that—their own design style was straight-laced, with a focus on keeping the world self-contained and without outside references. Rather than drawing off literary or cinematic inspiration, they wanted to create in each zone an experience for the players, one that would reflect the reality of Norrath. For example, if the zone was going to have an orcish village, the team would first work out what types of dwellings the orcs would have and then design the zone from that.



"Since *Luclin*, we've been steering toward making a really believable, in-depth fantasy world," said Waters. "We've got players who want to role-play and who want to take the world seriously. So we try to avoid having something like an Orc warlord with a goofy name. It doesn't lend depth to the world. I think that's what we're more working toward now—creating a world that people can feel is something respectable, something you could write a fantasy novel about and not have to go around the goofiness."

This does not mean that inside jokes or references don't appear, however. Some references can be found to things that occurred inside the game itself, rather than references to some outside source. This prevents the game world from being too personal to the developers.

"If you go in and do inside jokes, that

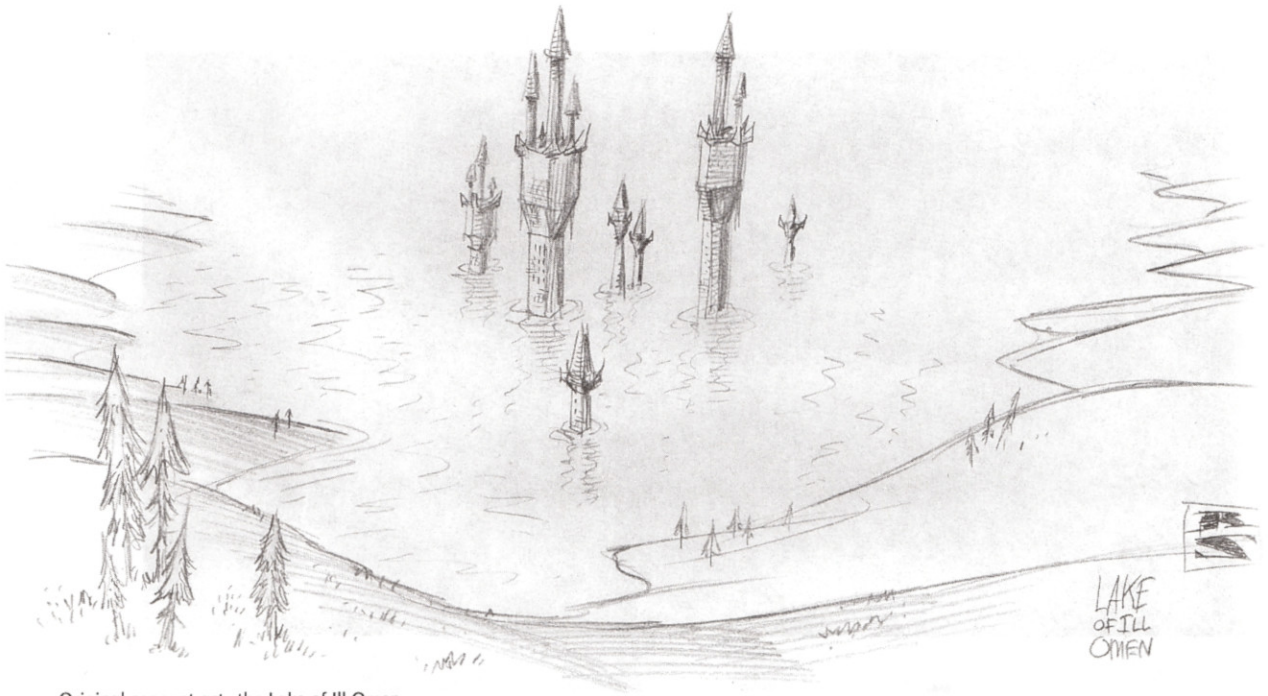
makes the game too much about you," said Lord. "The game isn't about the developers; it's about the community playing the game. I think a noticeable shift in the approach to making the game occurred when most of the original team moved on, and 90 to 100 percent of the new team are all *EverQuest* players who got onto the team. We approach the game in a different manner because if there's an inside joke, it should be an inside joke about something that we, as players, know happened in the game. I'd rather have somebody think, 'Oh my God, the person who made this character was actually thinking of an in-game event that happened two years ago and was obscure'—it shows that we're paying attention to the world, not that we're paying attention to TV."

By the time *Kunark* was released, the design team was large enough that Norrath was a vision shared by dozens of people, each of whom had a particular way of designing zones. While some zones were carefully crafted, others could be spontaneous. For example, for characters to get to the Lake of Ill Omen on Kunark, they have to first run along a lake past several monsters that are much tougher than they are. While it makes for a suspenseful run for the players, on the design end it was very much a matter of the person responsible for the zone being in a bad mood at the time.

The players also had to be taken into account—zones had to be balanced so that the creatures and quests would be a match for where the players were at the time. This was not always predictable, though—in the Oasis of Marr, just south of the Desert of Ro from the original game, was a large crocodile named Lockjaw, whose purpose was to give characters something to run away from and at a high enough level go out and kill. However, the creature would somehow consistently sneak up on players.

"I don't know how it manages to do it," Uzun chuckled. "You can see Lockjaw coming from a mile away, and it isn't quiet. But I've sat there and watched it happen, over and over again."

For higher-level players, the zones also



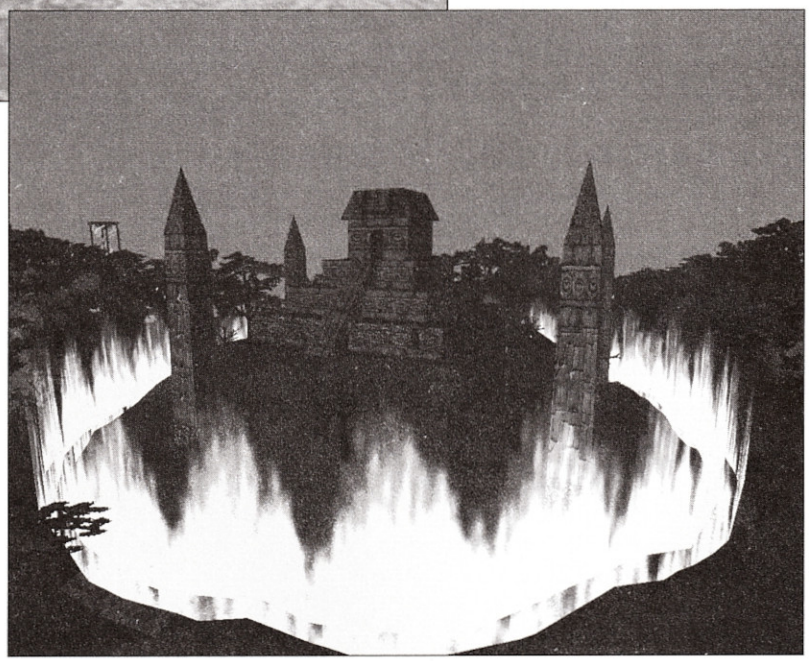
Original concept art—the Lake of Ill Omen

The Oasis of Marr

had to provide a strategic challenge. One of the early zones, the Plane of Fear, had difficult monsters patrolling the entrance portal. For characters to even enter and survive, they had to plan the raid like a military operation or it would be very costly.

Finding new places for the players to go could be a challenge. While nobody had actually defined the limits of Norrath, by the end of *The Scars of Velious*, the original map of Norrath had already been completely used up. This left the design team wondering where else they might take the players. At the suggestion of Jason Polk, the team decided to go to Norrath's moon, Luclin.

"There were a couple of things that we wanted to do," said Jeff Butler. "One was to make the Kerrans, which became the Vah Shir. We knew that one of the moons was inhabited, and some of the ideas we had about linking up zones and making travel more rapid seemed to make sense when applied to a structure that admittedly is very abstract from a zone-based world perspective.



The Plane of Fear

We were very interested in the structure that would be made by creating an expansion out of a small globe where a zone on one side of the moon could be accessed by traveling underground through a dungeon into a city at the core of the moon and out the other side—or accessed by traversing the zones that linked one another across the surface."

Two Vah Shir

The design team went even further with *The Planes of Power*. In association with the *EverQuest* Live team, several planes that had appeared in the original game were expanded and some new zones were added, along with content that hadn't really been seen before. In one case, on the Plane of Justice, players could take several tests before being allowed access to the other planes—such as a timed test, for which they had to prevent an innocent from being executed at a guillotine. As the players fought, the executioner would step closer to the guillotine, but every time the players killed a creature, the executioner would step back.

For the *EverQuest* Live team, the expansion presented new challenges, as the zone design had to be abstract and otherworldly, as opposed to the familiar settings used for the other expansions. One example was the Plane of Knowledge, the first stop for the players as they explored the planes, and, like the Plane of Justice, a central meeting place for players to gather before heading out on adventures.

Guillotines from the Plane of Justice

"We wanted to build this place that was out in the ether," Lord recalled. "It was completely detached from everything that you understand and it's dedicated to all three approaches to acquiring knowledge. So we ended up having a neutral, good, and evil district. We wanted to introduce the portals

The Plane of Knowledge

to allow people to traverse the world rather quickly and connect all starting cities—we figured that if you've got this area that's dedicated to gathering as much knowledge as possible, they're going to have portals that take you to every major cultural center. We knew that it was going to be packed—we knew that there were going to be a lot of people moving through this spot, so when looking at the music, we wanted music that reflected both good and evil and had the bustle of a crowded city to it, something that we hadn't been able to convey terribly well in *EverQuest* before."

For *The Legacy of Ykesha*, the development team fell back toward the story-driven premise of *The Scars of Velious*. Rather than present a new continent, plane, or world, the design team concentrated on new character models and filling out the elements of Norrath associated with darkness and evil. The expansion also allowed the team finally to explore the small island of Broken Skull Rock, which had always been on the map but had never been explored in detail. Additionally, for the first time in *EverQuest*'s history, an entire zone was dedicated to a pirate ship that the players would have to fight their way through.

"Esthetically, it turned out really well," said Lord. "It's fun to look at the traditional approach to different zones, like in *The Planes of Power*. If you've got a dungeon network, you've basically got four walls and stuff in it. So if you take away the walls, like in the Plane of Torment, you've no longer got a ceiling, but you've got a wall on each side and a floor, which allows you to do a dungeon layout but with a completely different esthetic. It's always fun if you can find new ways to approach the traditional dungeon layout or using the same tools to do something different."

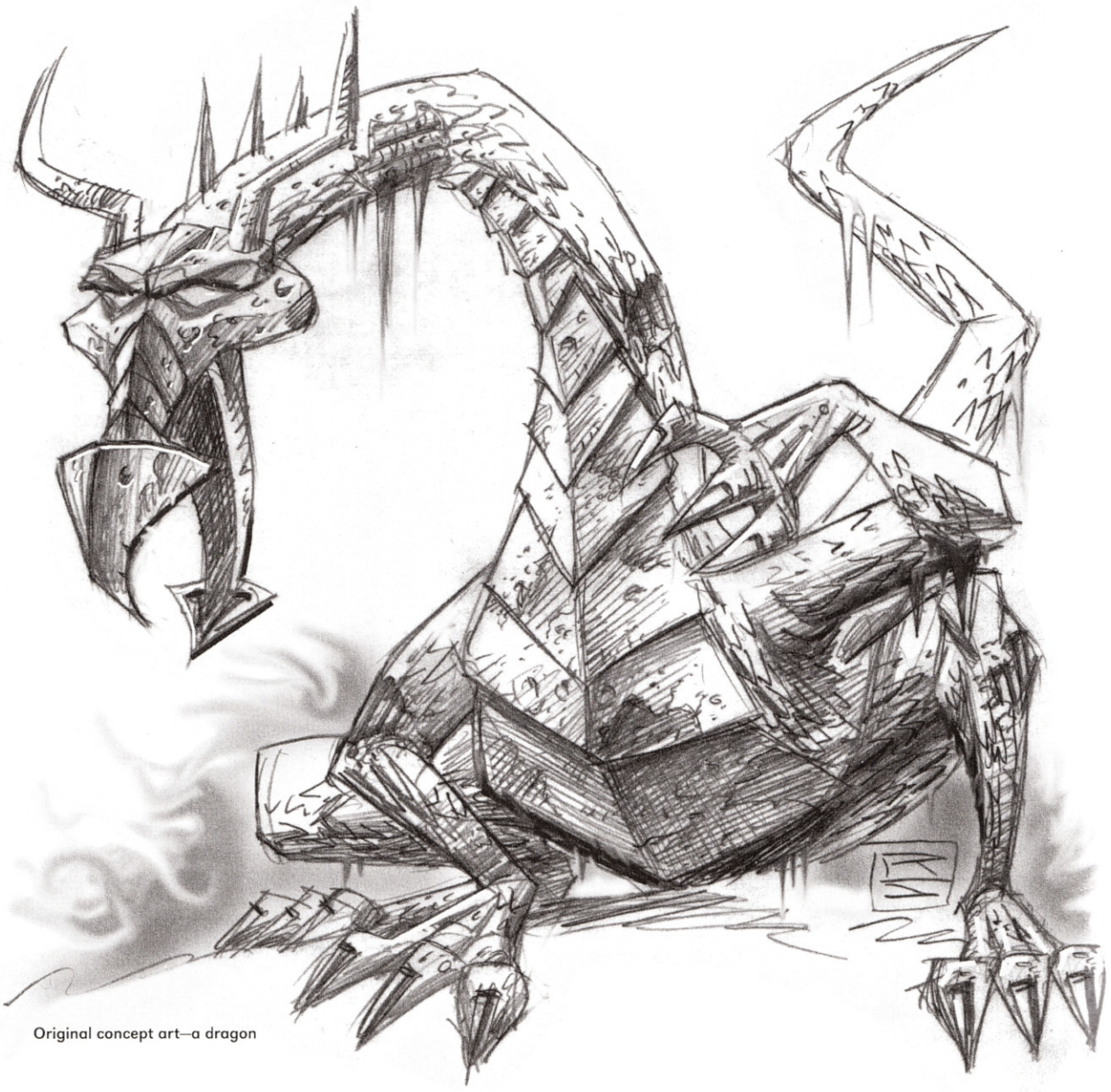
The upcoming sixth expansion, *The Lost Dungeons of Norrath*, is different from what has come before. Based around six-person groups exploring dungeons, one of the goals of the expansion is to link the storylines of *The Planes of Power* and *The Legacy of Ykesha*.

The balance was a challenge for the development team. Since each expansion had to bring in new players and satisfy the current player base, a good balance of new material that higher- and lower-level characters could explore was a must. In some cases, this involved revisiting the "old world" of the original release and adding new content, something that is still done on a regular basis.

In many ways, the expansions were a collaborative effort with the player base.

The development team had always tried to keep up with the player base, understanding what they wanted and how the game could be made better. As a result, much of the content of the new expansions, such as how difficult a Dragon or Frost Giant should be, was based around where the player base was in general and where they wanted new content to appear. This was combined with what made sense for that content. This does not mean, however, that the developers do everything the fan base tells them to.

"You have to think about the health of the world," said Uzun. "You have to take it seriously for the thing to have any life, and a lot of the games I see don't take their own world seriously enough. It results in a lack of longevity, because the content comes too quickly, and the mechanics become broken very quickly. If you took all the suggestions of



Original concept art—a dragon

Getting into the Game

One way in which the community and developers collaborate is with lore. Sometimes, a player or player group will come up with a bit of lore or a quest idea that is so good that the *EverQuest* Live team ends up using it in the game. One example was a druid quest from *The Shadows of Luclin* known as "the Protection of the Cabbage"—the original idea had come from a player who had submitted some lore, along with a quest progression, and the first person to complete the quest, Xanthe, had an earring named after him in the game. The quest was based around a group of nine druids who were elders in the community and who had spent the last two years in the game helping people out, one of whom had conjured up a lucky cabbage. All of the druids were mentioned by name in what became a very popular quest.

"It was a kind of goofy thing there, but it was goofy in an in-character way," Waters said. "We try to integrate things like that, where people feel like they made a difference somehow, or can go, 'Hey, that's the guy who helped me out when I was a little druid and now he's famous in the game.'"

what the players wanted, you would have a game that was easily beatable, and then you wouldn't have any reason to play anymore."

While the development team may not implement everything the players ask for, the message boards and player communities do provide an invaluable aid for game balancing and expansion ideas. One of the reasons that *EverQuest* has survived and remained balanced for so long is that the developers keep in touch with their fans and keep track of their opinions.

"If enough people say that something sucks, you have to at least step back and look at it and say, 'Okay, why do they all think this sucks?'" said Trost.

In some cases, the new content provided new challenges for the programming team. Horses, for example, first appeared in *The Shadows of Luclin* and required some careful thought to ensure that everything worked properly. Adding them had been such a conundrum that the development team had actually been avoiding it for two expansions—horses had originally been planned for the first game release.

"That one we dodged for a while," recalled Trost. "It was brought up at the initial release, and it was dodged at that point, it was dodged for *Kunark*..."

By the time that *Luclin* was being prepared, however, the graphics engine had already been pushed far enough that a practical solution was possible. However, conceptual difficulties still had to be dealt with.

"There were a lot of issues, such as what do you do with your horse in combat and

TALES FROM alt.games.everquest

Just two days ago I was with my new guild in Ssra, and we were camping insignia drops for Emp keys. This involved about 40 of us beating up on mobs with insane numbers of hitpoints. Since my group was at full health after I'd cast a few touch-up heals, I did my usual technique of targeting the mob, then using '/assist' to see who they were targeting so I could add some backup healing, if needed. That led to the following observation I made in the raid channel:

"When you '/assist' the mob to see who needs healing and you end up targeting yourself, you know you're about to get hurt real bad."

Indeed, I had lost about a third of my hitpoints before the MT took aggro back. This observation got some mild chuckles from the raid.

—Richard Lawson

Horses from *The Shadows of Luclin*

what do you do with your horse when you're not riding it," said Uzun. "We solved it in such a way that merged practicality with some degree of realism, so it wasn't such a burden to own a horse."

McQuaid added, "It was a challenge mostly from a programming standpoint, making it such that players could be attached to horses and that their animations and such would work appropriately. From a design standpoint, they were less of a challenge in that it was agreed to early on that horses would primarily be used as more efficient transportation, which already really existed in the form of various spells, such as Spirit of the Wolf."

The eventual goal for the entire design team is to create a living, breathing (yet virtual) world, rather than just mimicking one. As any massively multiplayer game currently stands, the game world cannot work without the involvement of the players—the living, breathing world is created, but it is only an illusion. However, as technology advances, it becomes more possible to turn the illusion into a sort of reality.

"You should be able to take everybody out of the game world who is a player and still have interesting things going on without them," said Waters. "Then, if you let somebody just fly around as an observer, they could watch what the world is doing, watch NPCs interact with one another, perhaps in a town have a dog that likes to chase rabbits, and see the farmer chasing them. That sort of thing should be going on without any player intervention—the NPCs should be interacting with the world and each other. Once you get to that level, which is getting more and more possible, then once you throw people in there to add their human element, on top of all the other wonderful things going on, it's going to be incredible."

The world of Norrath, its moon, and its planes are the result of a tireless effort by a number of very creative and talented people. However, the design of the world alone does not make for the *EverQuest* experience that created an entire phenomenon. For the game world to come alive, one other element was required, something that could only truly come after the game was released.

The community.

Reaching Out to Your Fellow Elf: Guilds, Forums, and Conventions

Chapter 6

Renie had been a net habitué for so long that she sometimes did indeed think of it as a place, a huge place, but just as geographically real as Europe or Australia. But !Xabbu was right—it wasn't. It was an agreement, something people pretended was real. In some ways, it was a country of ghosts...but all the ghosts were haunting each other.

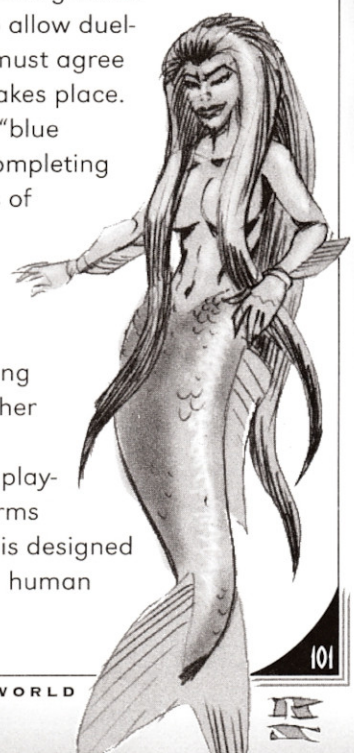
—*Tad Williams*, Otherland: City of Golden Shadow

It doesn't take long to realize that *EverQuest* is not like most computer games. With thousands of players online on the same server at the same time, what you get is something completely unlike an experience with multiplayer *Diablo II* or any other general RPG. Since most of the characters are human beings in the real world, they meet, make friends and enemies, and form communities. These communities can then interact with one another online and off.

Online interaction can take any number of shapes. It can be brutal at times—certain servers are established as player vs. player servers, and while general player-killing is available on one or two of these servers (known as "Zek" servers), others are arranged so that players war with each other based on the race of their characters, and on the Sullon Zek server, based on the deity the characters worship.

Other servers don't allow general player-killing, but they do allow dueling, where both players must agree to the combat before it takes place. These servers, known as "blue servers," are based on completing quests and killing groups of monsters in raids. They also have an area known as the *arena* where the usual rules of engagement drop, allowing players to attack each other at will.

Raiding, dueling, and player-killing are standard forms of interaction—the game is designed to support this. However, human



More Than Just a Game

Joel Herndon, the current leader of the multiserver Seekers of Lore guild, remembers a time when he was new to the game, and while playing a dark elf cleric, he came across a group of people sitting down in a semicircle, with two people standing in front of them.

"I got this tell to 'sit down,' and I did," Herndon recalled. "I sort of knew one of the players in the crowd, and I asked him what was going on. He responded and told me that the two standing characters were getting married. Suddenly I realized I was watching a wedding of a Shadow Knight and a Necromancer. It was at that moment that I realized this was not your standard stick-and-rudder game. There were many, many levels."

beings don't necessarily do only what the game is designed to do, and a number of other interactions can take place.

THE NATURE OF THE COMMUNITY

While events such as weddings may occur on the individual level, and racial or religious wars happen on the grand level, in-between players have organized themselves into guilds. These are communities, which can sometimes be quite large, based around common interests, race, or objectives.

Guilds, while supported by the game, are certainly not standardized in any way. They are formed by individuals and have almost infinite variety. There are, however, some general categories into which guilds can fall.

Casual guilds are essentially groups of friendly people who share common interests and are mainly interested in being friends. Although these guilds don't have the strict time requirements of some of the other guilds, they can be the closest knit of them all.

The Seekers of Lore is a casual guild, as Herndon states: "Each server has some control over how the guild is run. The main rule of the multiserver charter is to 'have fun.' For our branch, I have added as our prime directive that 'real life always comes first.' If you have to go because your baby is crying, then you log and take care of that—we'll be here when you get back."

The Seekers of Lore on Veesham

Casual guilds can be organized around any number of principles. The Seekers of Lore is based on exploring and documenting what they find. Nameless Love is a guild for gay and lesbian players, with around 30 members at the time of writing.

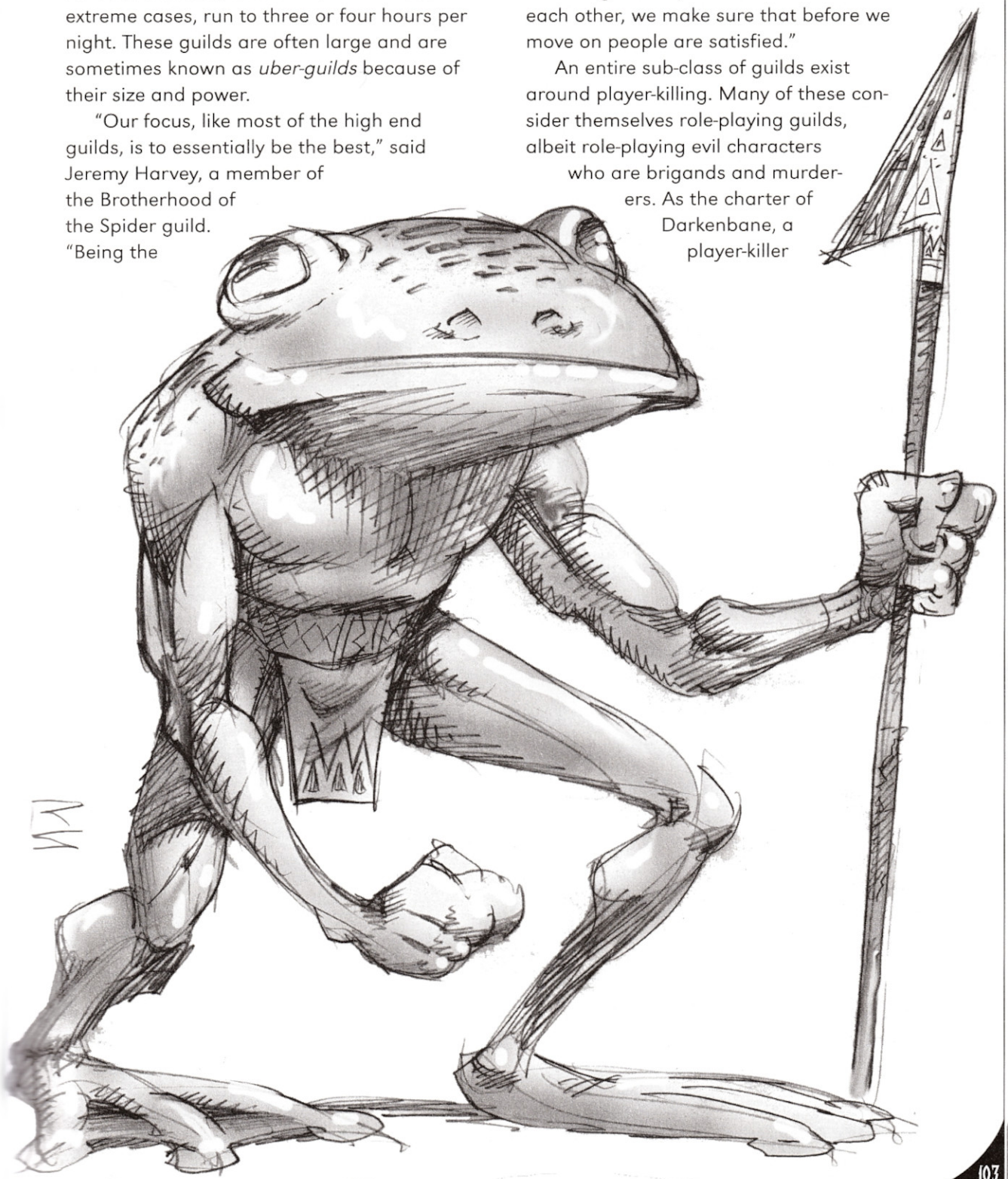
"Many of our events are social in nature," commented Kelly Anderson, a member of Nameless Love. "Up until recently the guild was not big enough to go on raids and such. We have power leveling sessions, language sessions, and generally are there to help each other out when we need it. I think very soon we will start seeing more dungeon raids."

Raiding guilds are more focused, organized around defeating hordes of monsters and completing quests. Unlike casual guilds,

raiding guilds often have time requirements for each member, which can, in the most extreme cases, run to three or four hours per night. These guilds are often large and are sometimes known as *uber-guilds* because of their size and power.

"Our focus, like most of the high end guilds, is to essentially be the best," said Jeremy Harvey, a member of the Brotherhood of the Spider guild. "Being the best doesn't revolve around forgetting about how we got that position. We take care of each other, we make sure that before we move on people are satisfied."

An entire sub-class of guilds exist around player-killing. Many of these consider themselves role-playing guilds, albeit role-playing evil characters who are brigands and murderers. As the charter of Darkenbane, a player-killer



Guilds and Events

Although most of the role playing for these guilds is initiated by the players, it is sometimes imposed by the Game Masters. This can sometimes have an unexpected aftermath, as Herndon recalls from his own days in a role-playing guild.

"A GM contacted our Guild Leader," Herndon said, "and made up a story line that Innoruuk's daughter would marry the guild leader of this Dark Elf guild and there would be a classic battle of good versus evil in which the forces of Tunare would fight the forces of Innoruuk and the final battle would come to pass in an otherwise unused zone of Kithicor.

"I believe it was a good idea on paper, but in the execution it just got weird. The guild leader at the time was already married. In order to make the event work, that marriage had to be annulled and you can imagine how that went over. Needless to say it was not a comfortable sight. It pretty much solidified my desire to seek a lower stress guild.

"When the event came to pass, it began when a new member of the guild joined the ranks. She was a member for a week or so. It was then discovered that she was the daughter of Innoruuk and the forces of good sought to drive her from the land. On the night of the event, she made a run from Neriak west, leaving a trail of bodies in her wake. The fight proceeded into East Commons and into West Commons and she was wounded but did not fall. The forces of good made a stand in Kithicor and we attempted to keep her alive but, alas, she fell as darkness settled on the land.

"From that night on, undead walked the lands of Kithicor and remained active until dawn the following morning, when it became the tranquil zone it had always been."

guild originally founded in AOL's *Neverwinter Nights* and active in *EverQuest* on the Rallos Zek server for some time before leaving for *Shadowbane* and *Planetside*, puts it, its members are playing characters that will be attacked on sight by any other players and are the evil force trying to take over the world.

"Our guild added a little extra to Rallos Zek, which many people appreciated," said Roy Froma, a member of Darkenbane. "Because we attacked anyone who was not part of our guild, everyone always had to keep an eye out. Whenever one or more of us were spotted in the zone, it was common that people started to give warnings in out-of-character mode of our presence because we were there for only one thing and that was to kill you. There was no other guild who got the same reaction."

Countering the player-killer guilds are the anti-player-killer guilds, such as the Black Claws or the Imperial Rulers of Destiny. These are guilds of player killers who target only other player-killers. The player vs. player combat between these guilds often resembles a small guerilla war, with small groups being ambushed by larger groups. Since death is not permanent in *EverQuest*, the war never ends.

"The only interaction our guild had with other guilds were wars, even with other PK guilds," Roy Froma recalled. "There were always the exceptions, of course, but this never included whole guilds, only certain members of other guilds (who we did fight on occasion just for the fun of it)."

Somewhere between the raiding guilds and the player-killer guilds lie the *role-playing guilds*, such as the Crimson Dragons or the Lightkeepers of Gaia. These are focused on character-to-character interaction instead of player-to-player. Essentially, each player is acting out a part, rather than being themselves. These guilds often overlap into other

categories; a strong raiding or player killing focus can exist in a role-playing guild, depending on the guild.

These categories of guilds are tenuous at best, simply because of the wide variety. Look at any server and you will find dozens of guilds, all with different foci. The range of people who fall into these guilds is as varied as the guilds themselves. Some are average working-class stiffs, some are military officers, and some are artists and writers.

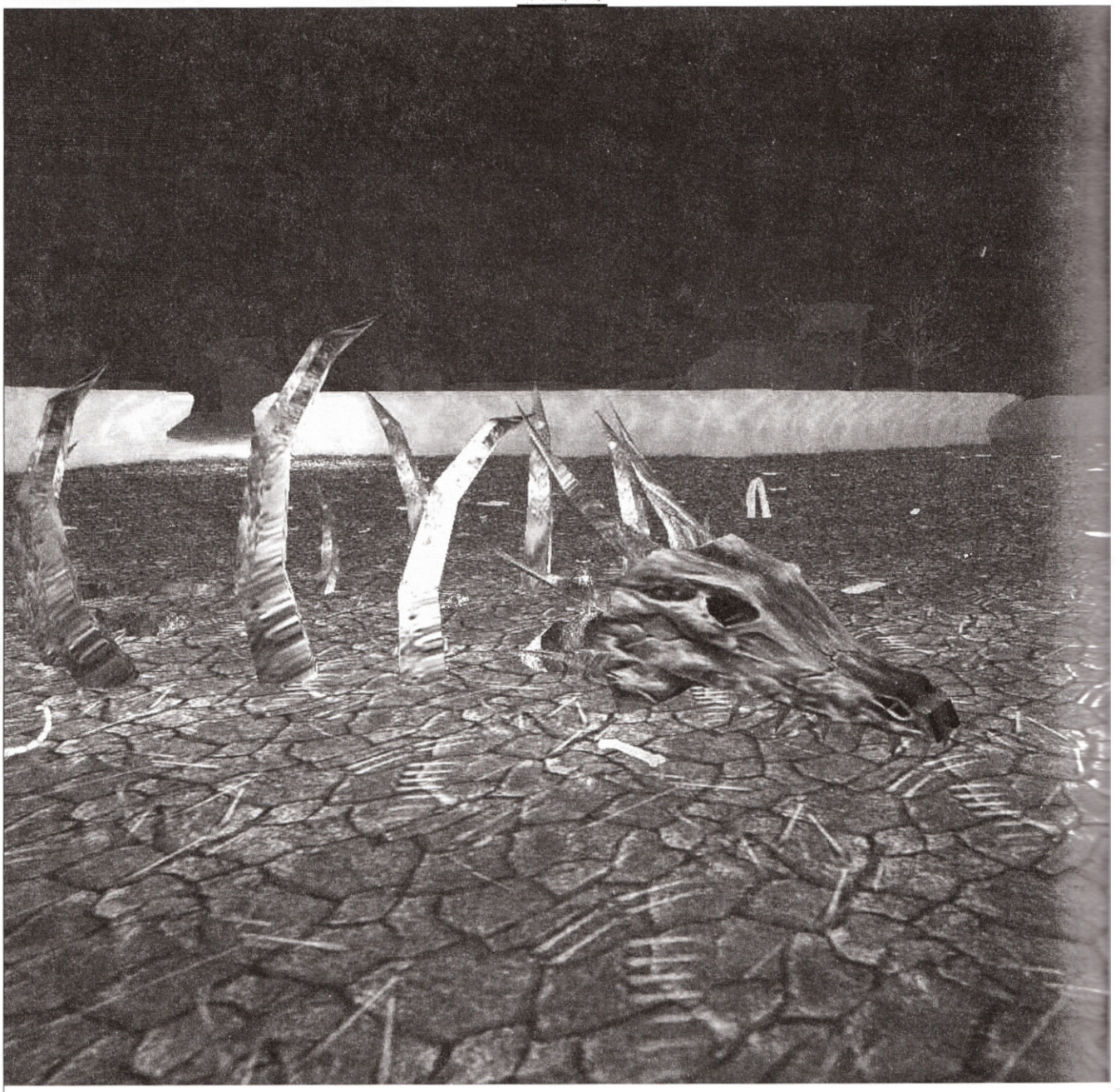
The Darkenbane guild in action

The creative element of the *EverQuest* community has a way of making the world of Norrath its own. Rather than being limited to playing in *EverQuest*, players began early on writing stories about Norrath.

This raises an important issue about the *EverQuest* community: at what point should a creative line be drawn? *EverQuest* and Norrath are the property of Sony. But when the player community starts to write original stories about Norrath, it is difficult, if not impossible, for Sony to have any control over the content.

This sort of amateur fiction is called *fanfiction*, or *fanfic* for short. It usually revolves around a popular media property, such as *EverQuest*, *Diablo*, *Doctor Who*, or *Star Trek*. How the fanfic is treated by the owner of the property varies—for example, Paramount has a no-tolerance policy in regards to *Star Trek* fanfiction, while Blizzard and Sony both have a "live and let live" philosophy about fanfic, Blizzard going as far as to have a fanfiction forum on its official Battle.net Web site.

However, while allowing fanfiction helps to keep the creative element of the community close to the game, and builds good customer relations by showing that Sony really is on the players' side, the company is also



held responsible for the content of the nonofficial stories. This issue was brought to a head in October 2000 over a story by a player with the handle of Mystere.

Mystere had been writing stories about Dark Elves for months before an event occurred that would become almost a public relations disaster for Sony. His stories were quite graphic, with scenes of torture (which keeps pretty much in character for Dark Elves). They were posted on the EQVault fan site with a mature content label and were quite well received.

Around July 2000, Mystere posted a story about a Dark Elf slave master trying to have his way with a 14-year-old Elf. On October 4, 2000, a parent who had come across the story complained to several anti-

porn and industry watchdogs, who talked to Verant. Verant, fearful of what the publicity would do to *EverQuest's* reputation, promptly cancelled Mystere's account. When Mystere called Verant to find out what was wrong, he was informed that his story had been brought to the company's attention, was considered extremely disturbing, and he wasn't welcome in the game any longer.

This puzzled and disturbed the player community. Sony suddenly found itself having to justify its actions, something first attempted when Gordon Wrinn, the Internet Relations manager, posted that Mystere had been banned for the good of the *EverQuest* community, as he was a bad influence, prompting Lum the Mad to post on his site that somebody had been banned from *EverQuest* for role playing a Dark Elf like a Dark Elf. When Andrew S. Zaffron, the General Counsel for Sony Online Entertainment, issued a statement on October 5 justifying the banning of Mystere on copyright infringement grounds, things got worse; half of the fan community was up in arms, while the other half was sending John Smedley and the rest of Verant letters of moral support. It didn't help matters when Gordon Wrinn, faced with two different justifications of why Mystere had been banned (neither of which met the player community's approval), declared that Sony and Verant would not discuss the matter in public.

The situation had become a public relations disaster, and Verant found itself watching customer goodwill vanish by the hour. It wasn't the first time that an MMORPG developer had made such a mistake in dealing with the public; as Jessica Mulligan pointed out at the time in her *Biting the Hand* column, just about everybody had made the same mistake. But Verant had to do something, or things could get truly out of hand.

Between October 6 and 8, Smedley issued a statement explaining the situation in full. He discussed the pressure from the industry watchdogs, adding that Sony wasn't wandering around trying to be a thought police, but it had to react. He also apologized for handling the situation so poorly.

On the side, Smedley had also contacted Mystere, apologized for how things had been handled, and made amends. Mystere posted that this had happened on the message board and commented that even though he was satisfied, he would not be returning to *EverQuest*.

Smedley's steps were exactly the right things to do. The situation was defused, and while some customer goodwill was lost, the downward spiral was stopped.

The Mystere incident had a decided impact on how Verant/Sony conducted its

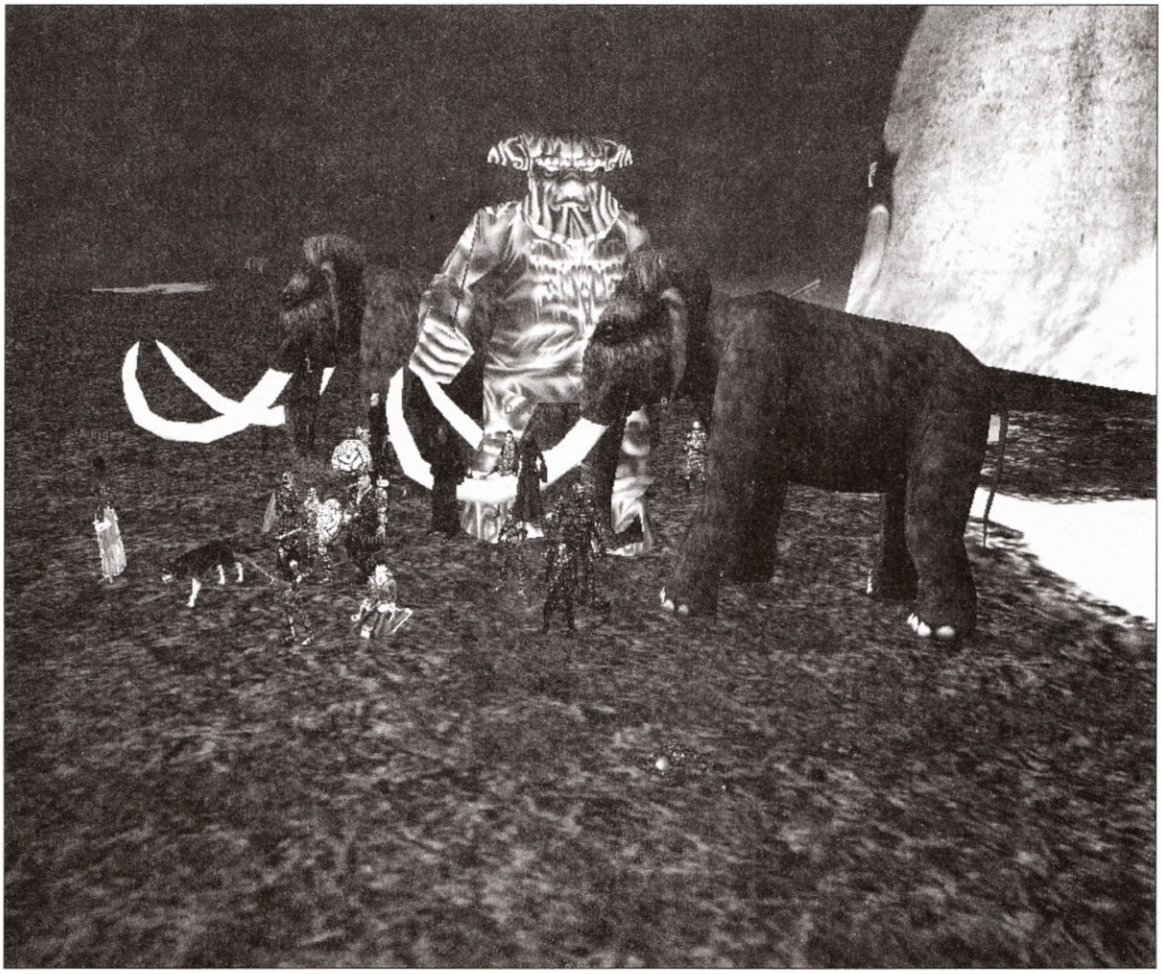
customer relations. While it still maintains a hands-off attitude toward fanfiction, it is now far more careful while dealing with customer complaints. "We now have more caution in terms of looking at things a little deeper," Smedley said. "However, I would absolutely not change the end result one bit. In fact, I have refused to put out policies on fanfiction, even though it was suggested by a lot of people that we do that."

Public relations gaffe aside, the incident with Mystere's story proved one thing beyond all possible doubt: *EverQuest* had a fully functional community. When one member in good standing was mistreated, even through a mistake, the local *EverQuest* community rallied around him.

THE NITTY-GRITTY OF THE COMMUNITY

Community interaction is not as easy to define as one might think. This is because we human beings, by nature, are not logical or predictable. We are incredibly social, but most of how we interact with each other seems to be as much informed by whimsy as it is by reason. And, as in the real world, in *EverQuest*, there is no one way that the player community organizes itself.

The most popular type of community

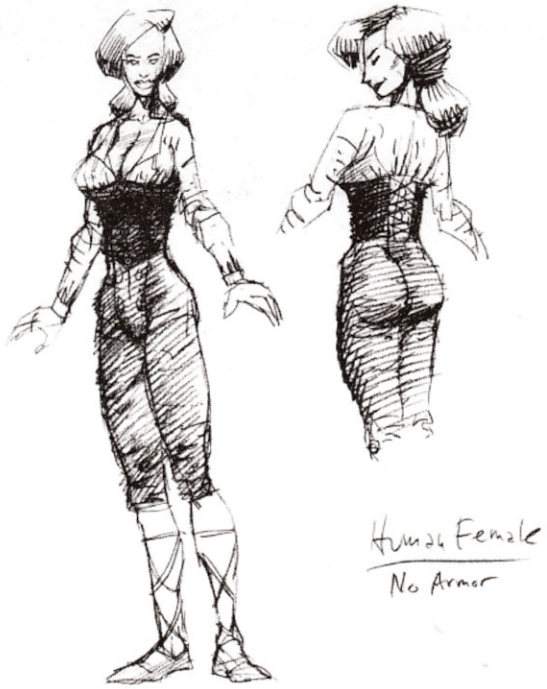


A Christmas party on one of the *EverQuest* servers

organization in *EverQuest* remains the guilds. With such a wide variety to choose from, a player can usually find a guild that matches his or her goals and playing style, or players can even start their own guilds.

What makes the guilds so ideal for organizing the community is that they aren't initiated by Sony; invariably, they are created by the players. How they grow depends on each guild; some guilds increase their numbers by invitation only, while others allow players to petition for membership so long as they can prove themselves. The organization of the guilds have almost as much variety as the guilds themselves—and even that changes as new circumstances arise.

"Darkenbane's structure was pretty straightforward," Froma said, with "one guild leader and a few officers where the guild leader would be completely in charge. The only real reason a few officers were assigned was to help with some of the guild management—specific functions like inviting new people, keeping an eye on the guild channel, that sort of thing. The guild leader would on occasion ask the officers for their opinion."



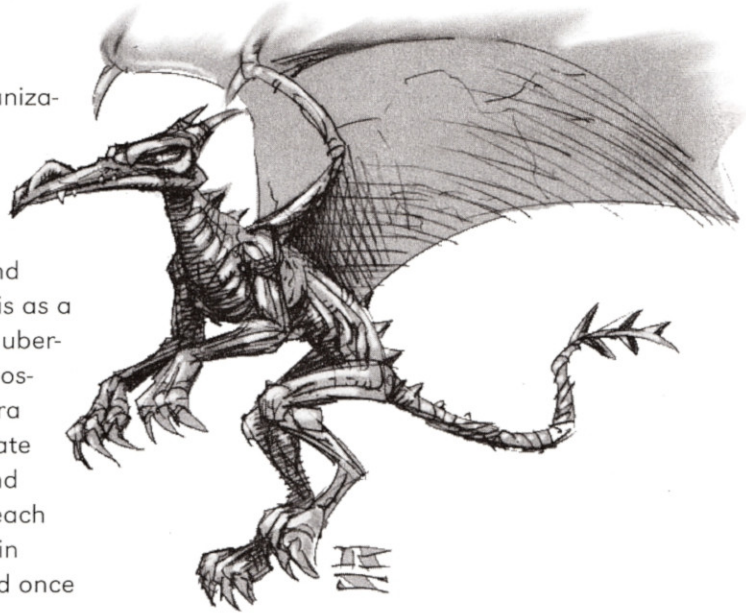
As Herndon recalled, some changes had to be instituted in the Seekers of Lore very early on, as Arcae, the first guild master, gave his officers territory to govern, much like a feudal society. "This worked rather well in the earliest days; however as mobility became more standard, the organization was also less practical," Herndon said. "Eventually, as real life duties took more and more of Arcae's time, he turned the duties over to Dangier, who, as school and his real life took more and more of his time, turned it over to me."

The guilds are initially established in a variety of ways. Brotherhood of the Spider, for example, was originally part of a power-gaming clan known as Organization Drow, which established the guild when some of its members began playing *EverQuest*.

The guilds are not isolated entities, however. Each guild interacts with others,

sometimes forming alliances and organizations, and sometimes declaring war.

"We have an alliance with some other guilds," Herndon said. "Dragon's Oath is one in particular. There have been several in the past and there will be more. We approached this as a means of competing with some of the uber-guilds and maintaining the family atmosphere. The idea is if we need some extra help with something we might cooperate with them or another Alliance guild and help each other out. We might assist each other on a plane raid or we might chain spawn an epic mob, once for them and once for us, so we both reap the benefits."



"Nameless Love has friends in a number of guilds—Dark Templar and Valor Guard to name a couple," Anderson added. "Many of our members join in on the raids they do. We have never had a guild war, and I don't think it would be anything our guild would be interested in."

The leaders of these guilds have numerous duties, including coordinating events with other guilds and Sony, talking to incumbents, and matching real-life schedules so that the guild can get together at one time in the game. This is not as easy as it may first appear; with an international appeal, *EverQuest* guilds can have members who live on different continents, requiring the leaders not only to coordinate working schedules, but also time zones, while meeting their own real-life commitments. The exact nature of these responsibilities varies from guild to guild.

"What I feel my responsibilities include would be to represent the guild positively both in game and out," said Steve Botkin, the guild leader of Nameless Love. "Plus to settle any disputes that I could between members—though frankly, that just hasn't happened yet. I should play as often as possible to at least show that I care, which I do. I maintain a character in each level of the game so I can group with as many members as possible whenever they want me."

The members of the guild form personal bonds, and this can spill over into real life, as players meet in person, become friends, and sometimes even become romantically attached.

"There have been several times when people get together," Harvey said. "There was a get-together in Vegas and again in Texas, and another get-together is planned for sometime early next year. What do we do? Have fun."

Much of this interaction between guild members is dictated by geography, however. With guilds memberships often being international in nature, two members could be living thousands of miles apart.

"Someone finds out they live in the same city as another member and they go shoot pool or something," Herndon stated. "There is certainly a degree of that involved. We have six friends from New York that either work together or are related to each other that play, we have four coworkers from South Carolina in the guild; a father, his son, and daughter, in Colorado; and a husband, wife, and brother in Oregon."

COURTESY OF JEFF MOYER

The Allakhazam site

Guilds are not the only way that the *EverQuest* community meets and organizes—the Internet itself has proven to be a godsend for those wanting news about the community or to connect with other players.

While Sony sponsors forums on the official *EverQuest* site, numerous large fan sites serve as not only news outlets and strategy guides, but also as part of the community itself. Some are purely a labor of love with membership offered for free, while others require a subscription fee. While many of these sites are now quite large, almost all of them have humble beginnings.

"I played in the *EverQuest* beta and was telling some of my friends about the game," recalled Jeff Moyer, who founded and operates Allakhazam, currently one of the largest *EverQuest* fan sites, with both free and pay-per-view content. "The job I had then left me with a lot of free time, so I decided to write up a player's guide to help new players get into the game—mostly to help my friends. I posted it on the Internet (I had never done a web site up to that time) and referred to it on some of the message boards. People really liked it and suggested some things that I could add to it, so I started to expand the guide."

While Allakhazam remains independent, several fan sites ended up being bought by larger organizations. One example is Cazic Thule Corner, which became Planet*EverQuest*, and was later shortened to PlanetEQ

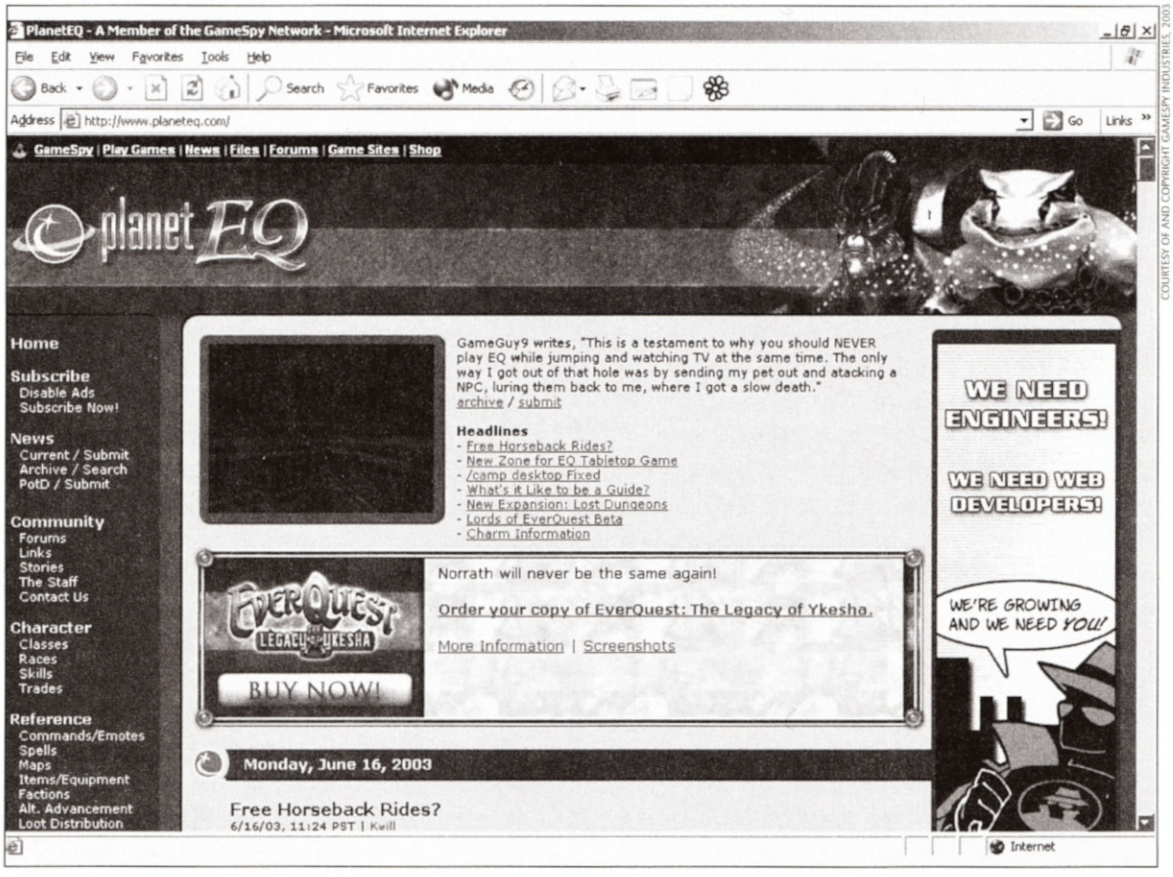
at Sony Online's request. "The original Cazic Thule Corner was started by Donna Anthony, known online as Aracknakat, and her husband, William "Delrachnid" Anthony, who played *Neverwinter Nights* and then migrated to *EverQuest* with her friends," said Mindi Basi, the current director of PlanetEQ. "The site started at the end of the beta test. She sold the site to GameSpy about two and a half years ago, and they redesigned it and made it one of their Planet sites."

Donna Anthony used the site to springboard to a position as an Internet relations manager at another company, leaving Basi to manage the site. "Although I maintain it, Donna's shoes were pretty hard to fill. She was a community leader in every sense of the word."

Some fan sites even start out as something else, and then become an *EverQuest* site. *EverQuest* Stratics began its life as an *Ultima Online* site; then, after *EverQuest* was released and the site owners became more and more interested, they began to cover it.

The fan sites are dependent on community participation. Many sites take steps to ensure that the site readers are as integral to the site as the administrators. For example, PlanetEQ not only has daily screenshots from fans, but it also has a fan-made trivia contest and a weekly poll. Most important, PlanetEQ has what is known as server guild news, where news is collected from dozens of guild sites and organized by server—and guilds are encouraged to sign up.

"All readers are encouraged at least once


PlanetEQ - A Member of the GameSpy Network - Microsoft Internet Explorer
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Maps
Items/Equipment
Factions
Alt. Advancement
Loot Distribution
GameGuy9 writes, "This is a testament to why you should NEVER play EQ while jumping and watching TV at the same time. The only way I got out of that hole was by sending my pet out and attacking a NPC, luring them back to me, where I got a slow death."
archive / submit
Headlines
- Free Horseback Rides?
- New Zone for EQ Tabletop Game
- /camp desktop Fixed
- What's it Like to be a Guide?
- New Expansion: Lost Dungeons
- Lords of EverQuest Beta
- Charm Information
EverQuest Legacy of Ykesha
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Monday, June 16, 2003
Free Horseback Rides?
6/16/03, 11:24 PST | Kwill
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The PlanetEQ site

a week to send in e-mails if they have feedback, corrections, or comments," said Michele Casto, who works on the Gameznet *EverQuest* site. "We include a link on every post that directs a player to an e-mail address to contact the site staff. On top of that, the e-mail address is mentioned again at least once a week within the text of a post."

"We are set up so that people can interact with Allakhazam and with each other on just about every level," stated Moyer. "The first level of this is through e-mail. Illia and I both get a ton of e-mail every day from *EverQuest* players. Many are submissions of new information they have discovered for us to post on the site. Others are questions about the site itself and the features we have in place for people. Still others are just questions about the game in general. We try to respond to every e-mail we get and answer people's questions as best as we can. Often, if I don't know the answer to a question, I at least know where to direct the person to look for it."

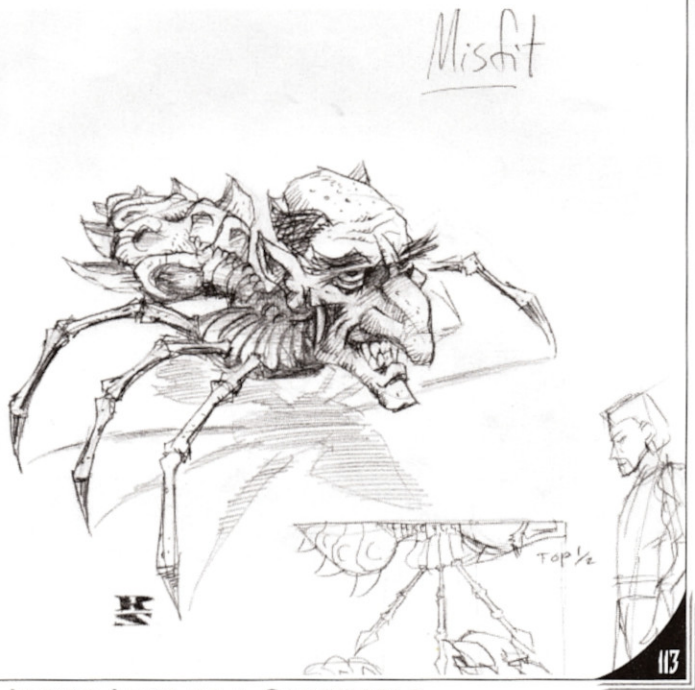
The fan sites will also go above and beyond the call of duty for their readers. *EverQuest* Stratics, for example, tries to run contests that will increase reader participation. "More often than not those prizes come from our pocket expenses and are done for the sake of the readers," Julian Goldblatt, one of the *EverQuest* Stratics staff, noted.

Many of the fan sites have forums, where readers can post their comments, discuss the game, and generally interact with one another. As Basi noticed, the forums can sometimes take on a life of their own. "The server forums are like a small town," Basi said. "Everyone knows everyone else from the game, and they gossip like mad."

"Our forum community is just that: a community," stated Goldblatt. "They talk not only about *EverQuest*, but about life's issues, politics, and anything else that happens to come to mind."

Indeed, the forum community can become so strong that members remain, even long after they've stopped playing the game. On Allakhazam, a group of forum regulars went as far as to create a guild for their fellow "forumites."

"The forums are really a community in themselves," Moyer commented. "Frequent



posters gain reputations through the quality or type of posts they make, and friendships and rivalries develop based solely upon the posts people make. There are some regular posters who hate each other and regularly take the opportunity to flame each other's posts, even though they have never met in real life or even in the game."

With friendships and rivalries forming on the forums, it isn't surprising that the relationships forged online breach the gap into real life.

"People meet one another in real life, and then they like to talk about it to their online friends," mused Basi. "Remember, too, that many players already know one another in real life. And guilds tend to bring together people in relationships that can expand the boundaries of the game into other aspects of their lives."

"Just recently a pair from our forums married each other after having met on those very same forums years ago," added Goldblatt. "We also have members who often meet up for lunch or dinner after having met on the forums."

With fan sites and their forums creating communities of their own inside the umbrella of *EverQuest*, the question arises as to whether these sites are isolated. Unlike guilds, the sites exist solely outside the game. The people who run the sites have a variety of opinions on how the sites interact with each other, or even *if* they do.

Allakhazam's Moyer believes that site interaction is inevitable, and advantageous. "One of the things we have always tried to do is to link to the other sites so that if we didn't have the information someone was looking for, we would have a link to some other place that might answer their question." As a result of this philosophy, Allakhazam has forged alliances of sorts with sites such as EQAltas and the Caster's Realm, even helping out when one of the sites is in trouble. Likewise, Goldblatt of *EverQuest* Stratics encourages fan site interaction as much as he can, along with Basi of PlanetEQ. On the other hand, Casto of Gameznet believes that often site interaction, outside of sites that are hosted by the same organization, is minimal at best, usually limited to answering e-mail from other webmasters.

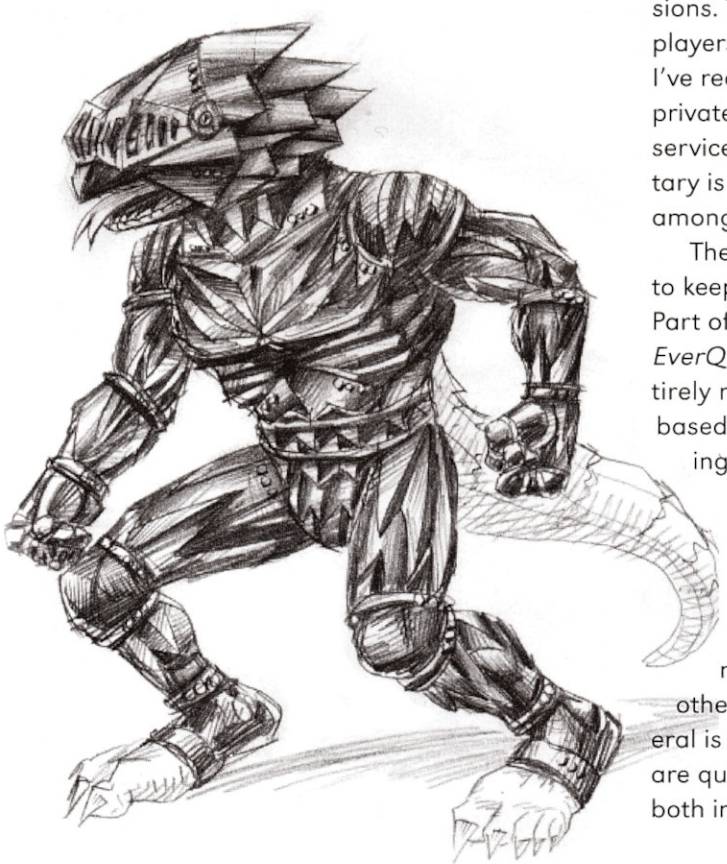
The variety of Web sites and guilds is a perfect reflection of the nature of the *EverQuest* community. Although it may be a virtual world, Norrath is a world populated by human beings, and as such it has seen the entire range of human relationships.

One of the reasons for this is the com-

plexity of the game. *EverQuest* is not a linear game, where the player can simply follow the story until the game ends. It is intricate and ongoing, requiring players to use their minds and form personal bonds to excel.

"The community is healthy, strong, and full of life," mused Goldblatt. "The people are interesting, the game is interesting, and there are a lot of folks wholly dedicated to supporting the community and keeping it strong. It may have started simple, but it has surely grown into something much larger and more fantastic."

It isn't surprising that the game attracts players from all walks of life. "Most of the players are pretty intelligent and expressive," Moyer stated. "Many of them are actually fairly well off professionals. I have received e-mail from doctors, lawyers, accountants, businessmen, technology professionals, and a whole variety of well-thought-of professions. There are also a very large number of players who are in the U.S. military service. I've received e-mails from every rank from private up to colonel in all branches of the service. I would actually guess that the military is the single most prominent profession amongst the players."



A Community of Practice

"The *EverQuest* community is a community of practice, and in that sense, it brings people together with common interests and goals," mused Basi. "It gives people a starting point to bond to one another in friendship. These friendships seem to be persistent and surpass the boundaries of the game. The Cazic Thule forums are made up mostly of ex-players who still stay in touch with one another through the forums. Many have not played in over a year and do not plan on going back to the game, but yet keep their player identities through the forums."

The nature of the community also tends to keep matters pleasant between members. Part of this has to do with the fact that the *EverQuest* game population is almost entirely real human beings, who judge actions based on their own beliefs, rather than relying on some computer construct.

"Mean people and jerks tend to get ostracized in the game and get frustrated and quit," Moyer added. "And those who are nice and go out of their way to help others tend to get remembered and rewarded by the other players. Thus, the community in general is very friendly to each other and people are quick to go to the aid of other players both in the game and outside of it. Oh there

are still plenty of jerks. You can't have a community of 400,000 people without a few loose cannons. Nonetheless, and I know this is probably a surprise to people who don't know anything about the game, I would guess that on the whole people who play *EverQuest* are actually better at social interaction and more friendly and outgoing than people in general."

EVERQUEST CONVENTIONS

The community is close enough that frequent conventions, known as Fan Faires, attract thousands of players. Bearing some resemblance to a Science Fiction convention, thousands of people gather at each one for a weekend of socializing and *EverQuest*.

The Fan Faires were originally started by Cindy Bowens. Due to an illness, she had

TALES FROM alt.games.everquest

I had just bought the game. I had created a Dark Elf wizard and spent two solid days trying to get my graphical issues resolved. I finally got the game running, and spent another day running around Neriak trying to figure out how to leave the place.

Distraught, I left my DE wizard behind and created a halfling druid. I started off in Rivervale and was just as confused by that place as I had been by Neriak. I knew nothing about the mechanics of the game, and nothing about what I was even supposed to do.

A high-level druid saw me. Of her own volition she stopped to say hello and ask what I was doing. I told her I was new to the game and trying to figure out what to do. She immediately stopped what she was doing and began showing me around Rivervale. She took me to the center of town and pointed out the important merchants. She pointed out the Priest of Discord to me and said that I should avoid him at all costs. She showed me where the Druid guild was and walked me through turning in my beginning note and getting my first-level spells—even giving me some gold so I could buy them all. She talked me through scribing my spells and showed me how to cast them. Then she explained the concept of macros and patiently walked me through setting some up so I could do a quest. Then she told me how to do the quest—a simple courier quest that rewarded me with gold and experience, enough to get me quickly to fifth level. All the time she was patient and friendly and encouraging. I asked her tons of questions and she helped me out a lot.

At one point she said into the group we'd formed together, "Just sitting here in Rivervale showing the ropes to a newbie." Clearly an accidental message, meant for her guild. She apologized for calling me a newbie, but I wasn't the least bit offended, and actually wielded my "newbie" label like a badge of honor—it was very exciting for me to be a stranger in a strange land.

Once she had me comfortably settled in, she went off on her own quests. I played around with my druid for a bit, then went back to my wizard and applied the lessons she had taught me to that character. I got him up to about level 15, then used what I learned from that to make a human cleric. The cleric became my main [character] and is now level 60 and still active on the Drinal server.

To my shame, I don't remember the name of the druid that took a couple of hours out of her game-playing time to help out someone who was new to the game. But her example of generosity lingers with me still. At the very beginning of my EQ experience I had the best kind of encounter with another player, one that convinced me early on how good this game could be. I've tried to emulate that behavior and tried to be encouraging to new players—because we were all new once, and being kind to a newbie can lead to a great gaming experience for everyone.

—Richard Lawson

been homebound for some time, with online games her only social outlet. In 1999, as she was still recovering, her guild moved to *EverQuest*, which inspired her to create a Web site called *Women of EverQuest*, which became a great success, with a lot of traffic from both women and men; the message boards filled with people discussing issues inside the game.

"Somebody put up a message at one point that said, 'Gee, somebody should put together some sort of get-together so we can all meet each other,'" Bowens said. "Well, my background was in event planning, so I put up a Web site asking how many people would be interested, what they'd be willing to pay, where would be the best location. Eventually, I did my first one in St. Louis."

As the planning went on, Bowens came into contact with McQuaid and Jeff Butler at Verant, who sponsored the event and sent some people to represent the company. The St. Louis Fan Faire was a great success. Bowens had expected around 100 people to show up—instead, more than 250 attended. The event was considered successful enough that Verant

BRAD MCQUAID

Bill Trost, Brad McQuaid, Jeff Butler, and other *EverQuest* team members sign autographs at a Fan Faire.

Attendees at a Fan Faire in Dallas

sponsored another one in Las Vegas in June 2000. Instead of the 250 expected attendees, more than 500 showed up.

"It was at that point that Brad McQuaid hired me full time, and we started doing the Fan Faires every three months," Bowens recalled.

Each Fan Faire had a host of activities, and with each one more activities were added. From the start, the live quest, where actors would portray NPCs and people would compete to solve the quest, was organized according to their server. Bowens also added round-table discussions where the players could meet the developers and ask questions, panels, and class-based discussion groups. One convention even sponsored an art contest.

Web site pictures to the contrary, costumes were rarely a major part of the Fan Faires. "I don't think we ever had more than 20 people showing up in costume," Bowens said. "There was a very small percentage who would actually dress up. The rest were there to pretty much meet their friends and guild-mates."

Costumed *EverQuest* fans at a 2003 Fan Faire in Las Vegas

The organization required for each Fan Faire was huge, taking up every day of the three month intervals between them. During that time, Bowens was responsible for every aspect of the convention, from organizing events to booking the hotels. Dealing with the hotels, however, tended to be an experience in and of itself, as the hotel staff had to be acquainted with the *EverQuest* subculture.

"I'd have to explain to them what to expect," Bowens said. "Now, they'd always expect a bunch of teenaged kids, and the first thing I had to get them to understand is that these are normal, professional

BRINGING THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER

One thing Bowens has noted again and again is how much the Fan Faires bring the community together. "This young man had written to me, and said, 'I paid to go to the Fan Faire, but at the last moment I almost didn't go, because a friend of mine had died of cancer the week before.' And he said that while he was there, he ended up meeting an older man from his server, who had also lost somebody recently, and they really connected and started meeting for coffee. So, meeting somebody at a Fan Faire had turned into a really important thing for him, since he had nobody else to help him through the loss of his friend. To me, that's the best thing I ever heard, because it makes me really happy to see people taking that type of online experience and moving it into aspects of their real lives."

people—the average attendee was between 25 to 35 years old. I'd have to prepare them for the language they were going to hear... that was always really funny, because a waiter would hear some guys saying, 'Well, we killed this guy last night and had to drag his corpse across the desert,' and I'd have to get with the whole staff and security and tell them that if they heard about killing and bodies, it was probably just in the game."

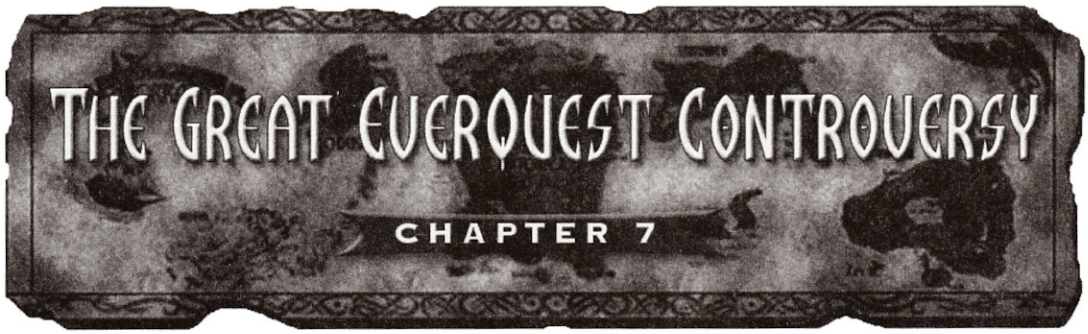
Although for most of the planning Bowens didn't have assistance, just before the event there was no shortage of volunteers from the development team or the game masters. "There'd be about 20 of us stuffing name tags in envelopes and mailing them out. I'd do all of the organizing and coordination, and then we'd all just jump in together at the end."

In September 2002, Bowens left Sony Online to create her own company, the idea being that she would organize events just like the Fan Faires for multiple game companies. Before she could really get started, though, McQuaid and Butler hired her at Sigil. The Fan Faires were placed in the hands of Tom Taylor, a former member of the customer service team, who has been handling them ever since.

"I think these Fan Faires have strengthened the community," Bowens said. "I'd hear stories back from people saying, 'I was getting tired of the game, and then I met 10 other people from my server, and now we're grouping together and having a great time.' There's renewed excitement for the game,

as you're making new friends, meeting the people you're adventuring with. You'd see a 15-year-old kid dressed in leather and chains talking to a 40-year-old doctor—you look at them and think they probably wouldn't have anything in common had they met any other way, but here they are, talking for hours, exchanging phone numbers, and having a great time."

With such a large and varied community, it was only a matter of time before some problems erupted. With *EverQuest* as successful as it was, when these problems hit, they garnered massive media attention. The entire community found itself facing a controversy, which would have the game and community misunderstood while gaining worldwide exposure.



HIS VOICE LOWERED AND HE REPEATED:
"A POISON — SO SUBTLE, SO INSIDIOUS...
SO IRREVERSIBLE. IT WON'T EVEN KILL
YOU UNLESS YOU STOP TAKING IT. WE CAN'T
LEAVE ARRAKIS UNLESS WE TAKE PART OF
ARRAKIS WITH US."

—*FRANK HERBERT*, DUNE

People like easy answers. That's the only explanation I have for it. It drives us to create demons where none were before, while ignoring those that are already there and laughing at us.

The word for it is *scapegoating*. This comes from an ancient Hebrew ritual described in the Bible in Leviticus 16, where part of a purification rite was for a rabbi to confess the sins of the Israelites to a goat, which was then led out into the deep wilderness and set free—the transgressions of the Israelites were considered to be carried away by the goat, and they would trouble them no longer.

Religious origins aside, scapegoating is something that happens so often that it clouds the actual issue. Do a Web search on *EverQuest*, and among the results you'll find a number of sites dedicated to *EverQuest* addiction. Indeed, *EverQuest* seems to have developed a controversy as well known as *Dungeons & Dragons* did back in the early 1980s. And, as with any controversy, some understand what is going on and others have missed the point entirely. Some claim that *EverQuest* is the most addictive thing since cigarettes, others claim that *EverQuest* addiction is just an excuse for people to keep playing, and quite a number of others are seeing some disturbing things and trying to work out exactly what is going on.

When I began to look into the *EverQuest* addiction controversy, I found a number of issues that were actually quite promising. First of all, relatively little scapegoating was going on. While some people blamed the game for the loss of their significant others, at least as many were trying to understand why these things were happening. As I write, I've received only one letter from somebody who actually believed the game was the cause of all his problems. And I didn't come across a single person who tried to claim that the game was Satanic.

This is quite a change from the *Dungeons*

& Dragons controversy. But then again, things are different now.

CONTROVERSIES PAST AND PRESENT

Video games in general are no strangers to controversy. Calls to ban video game violence appeared as early as 1976 when *Death Race* was released. The call became even louder as a fighting game titled *Mortal Kombat* caused an absolute uproar by, among other things, having a finishing move that gave new meaning to "knocking his block off." U.S. Senator Joe Baca's *Protect Our Children from Video Game Sex and Violence Act of 2002* is merely the latest development in this old argument.

At times, it seems that video games present a convenient scapegoat. They're relatively new, and many of the "people in authority" don't quite understand them. If somebody shoots up a school, and it's discovered that they played *DOOM* (a first-person shooter game that is quite graphic indeed), the game is to blame, regardless of whatever medication may be involved, the shooter's family life, and any mental problems that have appeared. Perhaps it is just easier to blame problems on what you don't understand than to look at all the dimensions of the complex issue that is actually present.

This doesn't mean that a problem doesn't exist. But with all the fuss and overreaction, the true dimensions of the problem with some gameplayers can become clouded. To see what happens when this is taken to an extreme, you only have to look at the case of *Dungeons & Dragons* in the 1980s.

For those who have never played it, *Dungeons & Dragons* is a game where a group of people sit around a table, while a Dungeon Master, or DM, tells a sort of interactive story. The DM presents a situation, such as a corridor with a pit, and the players, who have all created various fantasy characters, must then find a way through the challenges ahead. This is done by talking, rolling dice, and by the players dictating the actions of their characters to the DM. With a good storyteller and some players with interesting characters, this can lead to bizarre situations that are fun for everybody involved.

And then, on June 9, 1982, a troubled teenager (who, among other things, tore up small animals in the backyard) named Irving Lee "Bink" Pulling shot himself in the chest. His mother, Patricia Pulling, believed that it had been the result of a curse placed on her son during a *Dungeons & Dragons* game at his high school. She launched a lawsuit against Robert A. Bracey, III, the principal of the high school.

On October 26, 1983, the case was thrown out of court. Pulling then formed a group named Bothered About *Dungeons & Dragons* (BADD) and dedicated herself to eradicating the role-playing game, which she believed to be part of a gigantic satanic conspiracy.

Matters became even stranger as she began to present herself as an expert on *Dungeons & Dragons* and teen satanism, going as far as to distribute a questionnaire to the police for the interrogation of role-playing gamers, designed to determine at what level the player was involved in the satanic conspiracy. She prepared an additional questionnaire for the police, with questions such as "Has he read the *Necronomicon* or is he familiar with it?" (For those who have never heard of it, the *Necronomicon* is a fictitious book title created by author H.P. Lovecraft in the pulp era, which has since become something of an in-joke in the science fiction and fantasy fan community. You can sometimes find it in a library database, always checked out to a Mr. A. Alhazred, who in Lovecraft's fiction was the author.)

Pulling became famous in the media, as

she would bring *Dungeons & Dragons* into any murder or suicide case that she came across, even if nobody in the investigation saw a connection. When she discussed articles about murders or suicides, she would alter them to make the *Dungeons & Dragons* linkage appear damning, even if it was only mentioned once in a throw-away line in the original article.

Although it may be hard to believe, the *Dungeons & Dragons* controversy became even stranger. In January 1988, Pulling stated that she believed that about eight percent of the Richmond, Virginia, area population was involved in satanism (which would be around 56,000 people at that time). An article about Pulling seven months earlier had estimated a satanic conspiracy of around 300,000 people across the country.

What is unbelievable is just how seriously these allegations were taken. The controversy was great publicity for TSR, the company that released the game, but it placed the entire genre of role-playing games under a cloud. A Tom Hanks movie titled *Mazes and Monsters* was released, centering around a boy who loses grip on reality while playing a role-playing game. Indeed, some Web sites on the Internet still depict people being drawn into satanic rites by role-playing games, where the death of a character can cause the death of the player. The people pursuing the issue seem to have lost their grip on reality far more than the role-playing gamers they are attacking.

The controversy did prompt some people to take a serious look at role-playing games and their effects, however. What they found was far more promising than the satanic conspiracy to which Pulling had drawn so much attention.

Instead of causing people to lose sight of reality or enveloping them in an evil cult, RPG involvement actually appeared to be a valuable tool for teaching people to cope. This makes a great deal of sense; not only are tabletop RPGs social affairs, but they all are based on problem solving. Role-playing gamers were found to be more empathetic toward others, as they sometimes take roles different from their own personalities. One study performed in Australia even suggests that role playing could serve a therapeutic purpose, healing the problems of a breakdown by allowing a person to reconstruct his or her self and values through the game; eventually, the best attributes of the game character, which was an ideal, would merge with the personality of the player.

Dungeons & Dragons is an extreme case, as almost all of the controversy was an overreaction. While Pulling's grief is understandable (she lost her son, after all), the level to which she lost sight of reality, taking the media with her, would be funny if it wasn't so tragic.

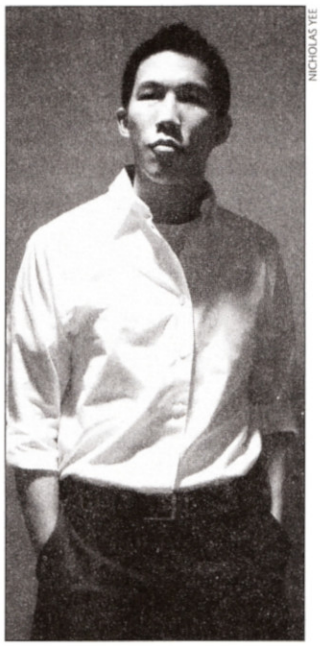
With new games come new issues. As the online revolution came into its own, the matter of Internet addiction rose as thousands of people began to use chat services and online games pathologically. When *EverQuest* was released, it suffered from many of the same issues as the rest of the Internet. However, it was not only a computer game; it was the most successful online computer game of its kind that had yet appeared. It was only a matter of time before *EverQuest* addiction would grab the attention of the media and become a big issue. The question was how it would be treated.

"EVERCRACK"

Like so many social issues, the truth behind *EverQuest* addiction is not sensational, even when the occasional member of the press tries to link the game to a greater tragedy. *EverQuest* addiction does exist—make no mistake. When it happens, it is terrible and tragic; when listening to somebody talk about how the addiction has destroyed his or her family,

it is impossible not to be moved.

However, *EverQuest* is not an all-destroying game that annihilates the lives of everybody it touches, regardless of what some extremists may think or what some of the media may suggest. On the contrary, most players are not addicted. According to figures gathered in 2001 by a psychology student named Nicholas Yee, *EverQuest* players on average spent 21.9 hours per week in the game; most people watch more television than that. In fact, just under half of the players he surveyed spent less than or up to 20 hours per week playing, while less than a third of players spent more than 30 hours per week playing the game. By hours alone, it appears that less than a third of the players might have a problem.


NICHOLAS YEE

Nicholas Yee

If only life were that simple—addiction rarely is. Some players in the lower range are addicts, while many players in the upper range are not. The problem is that, by definition, a game such as *EverQuest* has to be gripping to succeed. Players have to *want* to play for months on end, so the game is designed around a reward system where greater rewards require more effort, keeping players "hooked." Does this necessarily mean addiction?

For the most part, it doesn't. But, in some cases, it can. And when *EverQuest* does become an addiction, it can be a devastating one.

EverQuest addiction is a psychological addiction, closely related to Internet addiction, which began to be explored by psychologists in the late 1990s. This type of addiction is more than just an urge to play the game—it eventually comes to the point at which addicts actually have to play just to feel normal.

It is also something that comes upon a family gradually. As Avonelle Rand, a nurse living in Georgia, said, "We bought a computer in 1997, a year after we moved from New York to Georgia. [My husband] started playing PlayStation games, Nintendo, and other games such as *Baldur's Gate*, *Warcraft*, and *Age of Empires* with our sons, but we spent a lot of time together as a family."

The addiction came on slowly, but Rand soon found that she had "lost" her husband to the game. "He went from playing video games to playing *EverQuest* two to four hours a day, and then eight. Now it's all night long and on his days off from work. He plays on the two computers and tried to install the game on my laptop—I told him I would crucify him if he ever did that."

This gradually increasing dependence is a common element in cases of *EverQuest* addiction. When I asked Laura C. (she preferred to remain anonymous), the founder of the *EverQuest* Widow(er)s group about it, she recalled: "It had started as a 'hobby' to keep [my husband] busy, since he was unemployed due to our moving for my career. It became an excuse for not finding a job, and an alternate reality where he could escape for hours and hours on end, with seemingly no consequences. Any problems I had with the game were simply my problem—*he* doesn't have a problem with his playing; and I shouldn't interfere with his hobby."

It is tempting to say that a particular type

of personality is more susceptible to *EverQuest* addiction than others, but no evidence actually backs this up. When I asked Dr. David Greenfield, author of *Virtual Addiction* and founder of the Center for Internet Studies, he said that while a particular personality type did tend to lend itself to gaming, no specific sub-group was more likely to suffer an addiction.

"There are slightly higher incidents around younger people, but they are more comfortable around technology, and for the same reason, people in the technical field tend to be susceptible as well," Greenfield said. "It will probably follow the same types of demographics as any other addiction. It is a behaviorally based addiction, however—people who try to leave the game will actually suffer similar withdrawal symptoms to drug addicts."

Diagnosing this type of addiction is difficult. By definition, a good game makes one lose track of time, just as a good movie does. According to Greenfield, an addiction exists when the game has an actual, and consistent, harmful effect on the player's real life.

"It has to have a negative impact in their life in order for it to be a problem," Greenfield stated. "There is no formal diagnosis—this is all basically new stuff. It is really a question of balance, and how it fits into the rest of a person's life. There are certain people who become consumed by it, and they lose balance; they become unable to function outside of the game."

What causes a dependency such as *EverQuest* addiction is a matter of great debate. It is baffling at times; people who appear on the outside to be completely normal and well-adjusted can become utter addicts within a couple of months, playing without a care as their lives disintegrate around them. The game itself is gripping, but that merely means that it is a good game. By all rights, there should be something more to life.

Yee suggested that two types of addictive factors are present in *EverQuest*: attraction factors and motivation factors. *EverQuest* features a rewards system that keeps people coming back for more, that allows a player to build up a network of relationships, and that is immersing enough to make a player care about his or her character and the game world around it. These are all attraction factors; they are what make the game gripping.

Most of the time, attraction factors by themselves are not enough to push somebody over the edge into an addiction, although it can happen on rare occasions. Something else on the outside also comes into play. Yee calls these *motivation factors*, and he suggests issues such as low self esteem, poor self image, or a feeling of being trapped in life can contribute to *EverQuest* addiction.

Most research has shown that in many cases, something is lacking in the addict's life—perhaps, for example, they have family problems of some sort. In other cases, it can be far more subtle. When the player begins to play the game, it fills the hole in his or her life, providing what appears to be a solution.

"Addictions are about numbing; they're about avoiding pain in our lives," Greenfield pointed out. "Addictions are a wonderful and easy way to do it. Sometimes, finding out what they are numbing is really important. Addiction is a solution, but one that creates a lot of problems, and sometimes treatment is a matter of coming up with a better solution."

The addiction causes a vicious cycle. The problems the addict was trying to run away from only get worse from his or her absence, so when the addict returns to the real world, they may experience an immediate wish to go back to a place where the problems don't exist. This, of course, causes the problems to grow even worse, and soon their life has become a shambles.

If it sounds bleak, it's because, like any addiction, it is bleak. It isn't the fault of the game, though, no matter how tempting it may be to blame *EverQuest* for those who have become addicted to it. *EverQuest* is just a game—it does not involve the intake of any actual drugs, and the addiction is solely psychological. To blame the game for the addiction is tantamount to being mugged at gunpoint in a blind alley and then blaming the gun for robbing you.

SPOTTING THE BEAST

The addiction has warning signs, and if somebody can spot them in time, the damage from an addiction, or sometimes even the addiction itself, can be curtailed. The first signs tend to be an increase in hours spent playing the game, along with a change in a person's real-life behavior. For example, somebody who is normally a social butterfly will begin to become introverted; the usual things that a player enjoys doing will fall by the wayside to make room for the game. And, because the addiction is a gradual process, not only the player, but also friends and family, may not notice it at first.

"Often, friends and family are not quick to jump on it, as they figure that most time spent on the computer is productive," Greenfield noted, adding, "It's often very gradual, and just like drugs or alcohol, they need greater and greater stimulation to achieve the same amount of satisfaction. Certainly evidence of depression would be a sign, but social isolation is definitely the greatest symptom. In order to gain status in the virtual world, they have to spend time there, and the virtual world becomes their world; the real world is no longer important."

EverQuest addiction, like any type of addiction, is treatable. However, methods of treatment vary. Young, one of the few psychologists specializing in treating online addictions, suggests a number of treatment

SPOTTING EVERQUEST ADDICTION

How can you tell if you are addicted? You can take a test, which will at least let you know if you have a problem. The following is a variation on Dr. Kimberly S. Young's test for Internet addiction, with a question added from some of Greenfield's work, both variations on a test for gambling addiction. All you have to do is answer nine questions, and if you answer "yes" to five or more, you may have a problem:

- **Do you feel preoccupied with *EverQuest* (think about previous *EverQuest* activity or anticipate your next session)?**
- **Do you feel the need to play *EverQuest* with increasing amounts of time in order to achieve satisfaction?**
- **Have you repeatedly made unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop *EverQuest* use?**
- **Do you feel restless, moody, depressed, or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop *EverQuest* use?**
- **Do you play *EverQuest* for longer than originally intended?**
- **Have you jeopardized or risked the loss of a significant relationship, job, educational, or career opportunity because of *EverQuest*?**
- **Have you lied to family members, a therapist, or others to conceal the extent of your involvement with *EverQuest*?**
- **Do you use *EverQuest* as a way of escaping from problems or of relieving a dysphoric mood (for example, feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, or depression)?**
- **Do you have difficulty staying away from *EverQuest* for several days at a time?**

strategies, including disrupting the schedule of the activity by practicing it at different times and in different places, cutting back on the hours spent, external stoppers (such as setting an alarm clock for a specific time), and family therapy. Greenfield takes a different approach, starting with a complete stop to the activity, in-person counseling to help deal with the withdrawal symptoms, and then helping to come up with coping mechanisms to avoid relapse.

No matter what, both psychologists agreed that the cycle of addiction has to end, with Greenfield adding that something also has to take its place. "You have to beef up their real life—social skills, interaction—for them to plug back into; without [social interaction], they're more likely to relapse," he stated.

The most important part of the treatment—and the most difficult—is making the addict realize that they have a problem. Most addicts will not admit to a behavior problem, which sometimes causes loved ones to go to extreme measures to get their attention. As one woman told me: "This summer when I put a knife to his throat, it is the furthest I will ever go. I have never gone to that extreme in a relationship and that's why I am now deciding whether to stay or not."

Ironically, such negative consequences can often be the best possible thing that can happen. When an addict's family or loved ones make the addict comfortable with his or her behavior, they give the addict no reason to stop playing *EverQuest*.

"The rule of thumb is natural consequences," Greenfield said. "There has to be consequences for their actions and behaviors in their natural lives. Usually what we run into are parents who are unwilling to offer consequences. The best way to get somebody off of a game when they're creating a problem is to have their life fall apart so that they can't game. It is one step to pushing it into their awareness. If there aren't any natural consequences, there is no learning; people learn by real experiences."

Sadly, like any addiction, no real cure is available. "I think we learn to manage either problems or potential problems," Greenfield said. "Learning to control it, manage it, are more accurate ways of dealing with it. Creating an awareness of the problem is the biggest thing."

Obviously, *EverQuest* addiction is quite real, but how serious an issue is it? When Yee did his survey of *EverQuest* players, almost two thirds stated that they considered themselves to be addicted. However, when the same players answered some detailed surveys about their feelings and behaviors, the results were somewhat different.

EverQuest addiction can be summarized as having two main attributes: a negative effect on a player's real life and a real need to play the game. Essentially, the addict cannot walk away from the game and suffers from withdrawal symptoms if they try. Yee surveyed people on both of these counts.

When he asked people if they became anxious, irritable, or angry if they are unable to play, only 15.5 percent indicated that this was the case, with those playing more often more likely to suffer this problem. When Yee asked people if their playing habits had caused problems in their real lives, 18.4 percent replied that they had. Considering the main symptoms of addiction, this suggests that the level of addiction is 18.4 percent, perhaps 20 percent as a worst-case scenario.

Or, put simply, *EverQuest* has a lot of people who think they are addicts but actually aren't. I have a funny feeling that the fame of *EverQuest* addiction may be the cause of what appears to be a massive case of *EverQuest* hysteria.

EverQuest addiction represent a major

issue, however, for the mental health profession, where, at the time of writing, Internet addiction is barely recognized, much less *EverQuest* addiction. While four out of five *EverQuest* players are not addicts, this still leaves around 80,000 possible *EverQuest* addicts who could need professional help.

THE *EVERQUEST* WIDOW(ER)S

While most people who are addicted to *EverQuest* don't realize that they have a problem, the ordeal that they put their loved ones through can be crippling. Those who have "lost" loved ones to the game call themselves "*EverQuest* Widow(er)s," or "Wids."

In 2000, as the first cases of *EverQuest* addiction became recognized for what they were, no support system was in place for people affected by a family member's addiction. The vacuum prompted Laura C. to start her own group, the now-famous Yahoo! group known as the "*EverQuest* Widow(er)s."

"I started the *EverQuest* Wids group in early summer 2000 out of desperation!" Laura said. "My home life seemed to be falling apart before my eyes as my spouse gradually turned into a blue-faced, white-haired Enchanter named Sadre Spinegnawer. Well, actually, *that* transformation was virtual, in his mind and on the computer only. What he turned into in real life was an increasingly compulsive, increasingly unhealthy and overweight, obsessed *EverQuest* player."

Once the group was started, it took off rapidly. "The group grew *very* fast, mostly via *EverQuest* addicts telling their spouses, partners, and family about it," Laura recalled. "I think they were hoping to get us off their backs so they could play without us bugging them! We also got some publicity early on through *EverQuest* chat boards, an article in *WIRED*, and a couple of other articles. As you can see, we have currently well over 2000 members. I have gotten many personal thank yous from folks who have appreciated the Wids, and having a 'cyber-shoulder to cry on,' as our moderator Tony always says."

The publicity has made the *EverQuest* Widow(er)s famous. While I was researching the group and reading the posts, I came across no fewer than two requests from outsiders for information and an offer by MTV for people to appear in a reality show.

The group is an eclectic mix of individuals, now even including recovering *EverQuest* addicts, for whom the community serves as a welcome support group. "Many Wids are in the throes of divorce, still more are struggling to piece their families back together," Laura said. "The other day, we had our first *EverQuest* Orphan post. He asked us to help him because his parents are getting divorced over *EverQuest*. We have mothers and fathers who are worried about their addicted kids. We have men who struggle to single-handedly raise their children as their wives lose themselves in "EQLand." We have college kids who are failing and worried about losing their financial aid because of *EverQuest*. We have pregnant women who are terrified to bring their child into the world without a father, because dad is hooked up to his own umbilical cord—the mouse that hooks him into *EverQuest*."

For the members, the group is a godsend. "When you have other people going through the same thing, you know it's real, that you're not going crazy," Avonelle Rand said. "It's pretty good. I'm not alone, and that helps a lot."

TWO SUICIDES AND A MURDER

There's nothing quite like a death to make the public aware of something—or, more specifically, to cause the media to become aware of something.

It's not really surprising. When there's a real-life death involved, there's no denying that a problem exists. Such devastating

events make people search for answers. Sometimes they get the right ones, and sometimes they don't.

Although when most people think about the controversies that have surrounded *EverQuest*, the first things they think about are addiction and two suicides, usually in that order. However, the first time somebody lost their life in a way related to the game was no suicide—it was an accidental death.

The first death linked to *EverQuest* was a nine-month-old child named Tony Lamont Bragg, Jr., who was left with his father, 25-year-old Tony Lamont Bragg, Sr., in July 2000, when his mother's electricity cut out. Bragg kept his infant son in a playpen shut away in a utility closet night and day for more than a week, essentially ignoring the boy.

Bragg was playing *EverQuest*, but his son's cries annoyed him. When the child made too much noise, the authorities believe that Bragg squeezed the child to make him shut up and then left him in the utility closet for more than 24 hours. Whatever Bragg did, the treatment left his boy with a broken rib that punctured his heart, a broken collar bone, and bruises across the child's face. Bragg noticed that his son was dead when he went to retrieve the boy before dropping the child off at his wife's mobile home. The boy had been dead for more than a day.

What is encouraging is how the press handled the situation. Rather than immediately blame the game, both the *St. Petersburg Times* and police dug deeper. The situation at the Bragg home became uglier and uglier.

Bragg had long been under suspicion of drug use, and he had already faced charges related to drugs, weapons, and grand theft. His separated (and later divorced) wife, Brandy L. Rozier, had been a concern of child welfare workers, who were suspicious that her house was not clean. Allegations of child abuse had been made but not sustained, at least until the death.

On January 2, 2001, Bragg pled guilty to aggravated manslaughter and was sentenced to 15 years in prison, with an additional 5 years of probation added by the judge. The charge was bargained down from first degree murder on the grounds that the death was unintentional. Instead, it was considered a very extreme case of neglect.

Oddly, the computer game sites made more of an issue about *EverQuest*'s involvement than the newspaper originally reporting the incident. The *St. Petersburg Times* reported the full story, presenting a convicted felon whose negligence caused the death of his son. An *EverQuest* addiction may indeed have been involved, but the newspaper articles don't make any direct reference to one. Several game sites denied that an *EverQuest* addiction was responsible, and GamerWeb PC went as far as to claim that the media had placed too much of an emphasis on the matter. It was almost as if a paranoia still existed from the way *Dungeons & Dragons* had been treated, and the game sites didn't want computer games to be painted with the same brush.

The second death reported was a suicide, but, like the first death, all was not as it first appeared. On November 14, 2000, the Quellious Quarters community board was shocked to learn that Sheyla Morrison, a.k.a. Leza in *EverQuest*, a volunteer customer service representative, had taken her own life after losing her job.

Morrison was a 19-year-old mother who had lost her own mother at the age of 15, gave birth at the age of 16, and lost her child to the state when her father had her declared unfit to be a parent. She suffered from depression, and after her child was taken away, the only thing she had in her life was *EverQuest*.

Morrison had first appeared in March or April 2000, introducing herself as being from Colorado (sometimes, Oklahoma) and joining

the Companions of Light guild. She had a sister named Jolena join her in the game, and she managed to log enough hours that Verant allowed her to become a guide.

Morrison's tenure as a guide was marred by controversy. She had a tendency to lie, at one point claiming to have cancer of the aorta to get sympathy, and she could often be unpleasant. On November 10, 2000, a post accredited to her guide name appeared on an *EverQuest* community board, violating Verant's rules about communicating with the player population (guides aren't allowed to use their guide names in outside communications). The post was later edited—"HAHAHAHAHAHA SuXoRs I got her fired!!!!" was added to the bottom. The following Monday, Morrison's husband and foster mother posted to say that Morrison, overcome by grief at the loss of her job and stress at the fight to get back her child, had committed suicide.

The *EverQuest* community went into mourning; nothing like this had ever happened, and it shook the player population to the core. But something wasn't right. Verant began to delete posts with Morrison's name on it, and the company refused to start an investigation or even comment on her death. William Joseph Seemer, one of Morrison's fellow guild members, began looking for obituaries, to find no reports of related suicides at all. When the Adrenaline Vault, with the help of Morrison's Internet Service Provider (ISP), traced the dial-up number used by Morrison, they found that the name on the account matched the name of Morrison's husband, but the police had no reports of any matching suicides in the area.

Within a week, the truth was known. There was no Sheyla Morrison—there never had been. Sandy Brundage of Gamers.com reported that Sheyla Morrison and her entire family had been created and played by a couple in Oklahoma city; the husband played Sheyla, and the wife was Jolena. When the couple had broken up, the husband had posted the suicide as part of a ploy to make it appear as though his wife had faked it all, proving her mentally unstable and gaining custody of the children.

Although the suicide itself was a hoax, it raised new issues in the *EverQuest* community. For the first time, many players found themselves wondering about the number of hours they played online and began to question the issues of compulsive *EverQuest* use. Even now, people have not forgotten these issues; as stated earlier, close to two thirds of *EverQuest* players are concerned that they may be addicts. The concerns of the *EverQuest* widows and widowers were finally being taken seriously by the players.

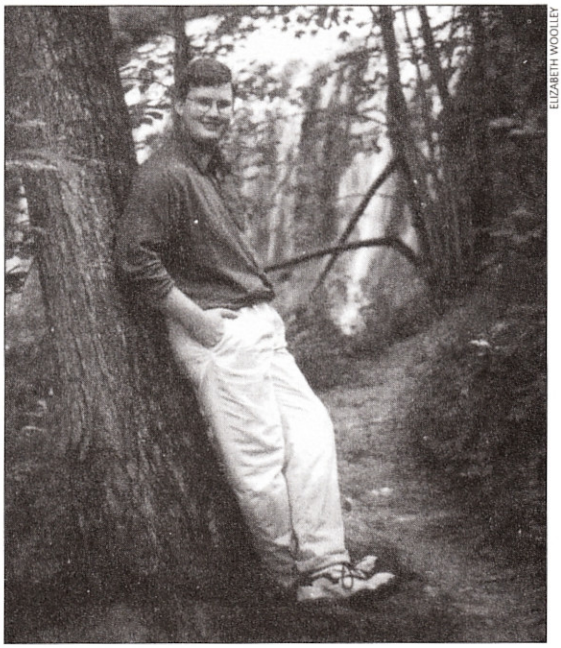
Unfortunately, the second suicide that was linked to *EverQuest* was all too real. Furthermore, it represented a fundamental failure of much of the mental health profession to recognize and treat the problem before it took the worst possible turn.

On November 22, 2001, Shawn Woolley, a 21-year-old Hudson, Wisconsin, *EverQuest* addict suffering from epilepsy, was found dead in front of his computer by his mother, Elizabeth Woolley. He had shot himself in the neck with a rifle. He had killed himself immediately after logging off *EverQuest*.

Before he began playing *EverQuest*, Woolley suffered from epilepsy, but he had it under control and was taking medication. Woolley first began playing *EverQuest* in February 2000. At that point, it was a pleasant diversion; Woolley was a well-adjusted young man with good relationships with family and friends. In April, Woolley moved out of his parents' home, renting a room from a landlord with a good computer. At this point, Woolley's star was rising—he was an assistant manager at work, and while his *EverQuest* playing was beginning to become compulsive, it was still under control.

The shock that turned the game into a

full-fledged addiction came on July 1. Woolley's manager's wife suffered from epilepsy, and he understood the nature of a seizure. Woolley had been playing a marathon session of *EverQuest* the previous day, and the game had triggered a massive and violent seizure, which under most circumstances would have taken a couple of days to recover from. Even though Woolley's boss knew what had happened, he rewarded the young man's work ethic by refusing to send him



ELIZABETH WOOLLEY

Shawn Woolley

home, even keeping him working overtime when Woolley was clearly not physically capable of it. In anger and disgust, Woolley walked off the job.

The incident triggered a depression that sent Woolley fleeing so deep into the game that it was months before he was brought back out of it. Where earlier, Woolley had been a model tenant, even helping his landlord, now he became completely withdrawn. He didn't find a new job or leave the apartment; for that matter, he didn't even buy his own food. By September 2000, Woolley was being evicted from his apartment. Elizabeth Woolley, realizing there was a problem and that her son needed help, took him back home and began to seek help from a counselor.

At this time, however, Internet addiction was barely recognized, and in many places psychological addiction itself was considered to be nonexistent. When Elizabeth Woolley took her son out for counseling, the counselor, finding that there were no drugs involved, declared that no addiction existed. Mrs. Woolley's attempts to get her son back into the real world, pushing him to get a job and get on with his life, began to cause tension inside the family, as the young Woolley preferred to spend his time inside the game. Matters came to a head in mid-December, when the tension became so strong that Elizabeth Woolley had to ask her son to leave. Woolley moved into a hotel.

And then came a chance encounter that led Mrs. Woolley to a treatment center in St. Croix county. In January, the center began to test her son, diagnosing that there was indeed a problem. Woolley was suffering from depression and schizoid behavior—however, they didn't see a linkage between the symptoms and the game. Regardless, once the diagnosis was made, Woolley was placed in a group home, where he took medication, was under careful watch, and received regular counseling.

Although Elizabeth Woolley wasn't allowed to be directly involved in the treatment of her son, she was thrilled to see that he was improving. Between January and June, Woolley showed considerable improvement, if for no other reason than the group home didn't have a computer.

But there was a cloud behind the silver lining. Although Woolley's symptoms were being treated, the addiction itself was not even recognized. Woolley would return home when his mother wasn't there and

play *EverQuest*, sometimes all night long. Elizabeth Woolley did what she could to stop him, but it became more and more difficult to control. When she took the computer keyboard to work with her, Woolley merely bought one of his own.

June 2001 was a crucial month in the Woolley case. On one hand, the youth showed great improvement—at least Woolley was employed again. On the other hand, Woolley decided that he wanted to move out and get his own place. While Elizabeth Woolley realized that her son needed to be around other human beings and argued with the group home not to let him isolate himself again, the group home was based around promoting independent living. They found Woolley an apartment and helped him to move in. At this time, he was still returning to his mother's home to play *EverQuest*. The case could go either way, but this time there was no happy ending in sight.

Elizabeth Woolley

On July 20, 2001, while Woolley was playing *EverQuest* at home, the game triggered a massive and debilitating seizure. Not only did Woolley suffer the usual effects of the seizure, but he also became delusional, hallucinating that he was inside the game. When his mother called an ambulance, the paramedics treated it as they would any other seizure. When Mrs. Woolley tried to get some professional help for her son, none of the people she talked to would even recognize that an addiction existed. Since Woolley hadn't made any threats of violence against himself or others, Elizabeth Woolley could not have him committed. In desperation, she forbade him from playing on her computer again, in the hope that it would stop him.

It was the beginning of the end. In August, Woolley bought a second-hand computer, on which he installed and began to play *EverQuest*. In September, Woolley had his phone disconnected so that it wouldn't interfere with his playing time. The only way his mother could speak to him was to call him at work and make an appointment. The addiction had completely taken hold.

On October 30, 2001, something happened inside the game, although at the time Elizabeth Woolley didn't know about it; her son rarely told her anything about what happened while he was playing *EverQuest*. Whatever happened, it shook Woolley to the core. Woolley stopped playing between October 30 and November 10, and when he returned home for Halloween, he told his mother that he had stopped taking his medication. As it turned out, he also had a new case worker who he refused to allow into his apartment.

In November 2001, Elizabeth Woolley decided that she wanted her son to be able to spend Thanksgiving with his family. Two weeks before the holiday, she tried to contact Woolley through his workplace, but it was to no avail; when she finally did get to speak to his supervisor after a week of trying, she learned that her son hadn't been in all week and his coworkers were getting worried. Woolley was not the type of person to miss work. By this time, Woolley had started playing *EverQuest* again, but on a different server. More ominously, on November 13, Woolley had bought a gun.

The Thursday before Thanksgiving, Mrs. Woolley went to her son's apartment to find out what was going on. Woolley wouldn't let her into the apartment, keeping a chain across the door the entire time he spoke to her. He claimed that he had changed jobs and gave her a place to go to let him know

when she would be coming to collect him for the holiday dinner.

When Elizabeth Woolley went to the new workplace on Monday morning to let her son know about the family plans, she was shocked to learn that they had never heard of Shawn Woolley, even though he was supposed to be starting that day. The next day, when Mrs. Woolley spoke to the day manager, she learned that the company had never hired her son.

On Wednesday, November 21, Elizabeth Woolley returned to her son's apartment and pounded on the door. When Woolley didn't answer, she tried knocking on the windows, but he didn't answer. The next day, she got the landlord's help in opening the door. Woolley was sitting at the computer, a bullet hole in his neck and an *EverQuest* screen on his monitor. The computer's logs stated that the last time he had played was November 20.

Something had happened in *EverQuest*, something so traumatic that Woolley made the decision to end his life over it. The only clue Elizabeth Woolley has is that when her son stopped playing for almost two weeks, the account name he had last used was "Iluvyou."

This is the first time that an accurate picture of the Woolley case has appeared in print. Most of the newspaper articles are misleading, presenting a picture of a troubled young man with depression existing prior to his playing *EverQuest*, when quite the reverse is true. None have mentioned the utter failure of the mental health profession to recognize and treat Woolley's addiction. Had the counselors and case workers treated Woolley's case as an addiction, concentrating on the addiction itself instead of spending time controlling the symptoms, Woolley might have been alive today.

The Woolley suicide is easily the worst-case scenario of *EverQuest* addiction. Addiction of any sort is by nature destructive; it is a cycle that eventually destroys the person caught in it and causes tremendous pain to the people around the addict. After the suicide, Elizabeth Woolley did what she could to make sense of it all, but the legacy of *EverQuest* controversies caught up to her.

Sony reacted with caution and even skepticism when Mrs. Woolley tried to find out what had happened in the last few hours her son had played the game. After the Sheyla Morrison hoax, the company wasn't certain whether Shawn Woolley was real or not, and, citing privacy issues, is at the time of writing still debating whether or not to release information regarding Shawn Woolley's *EverQuest* account.

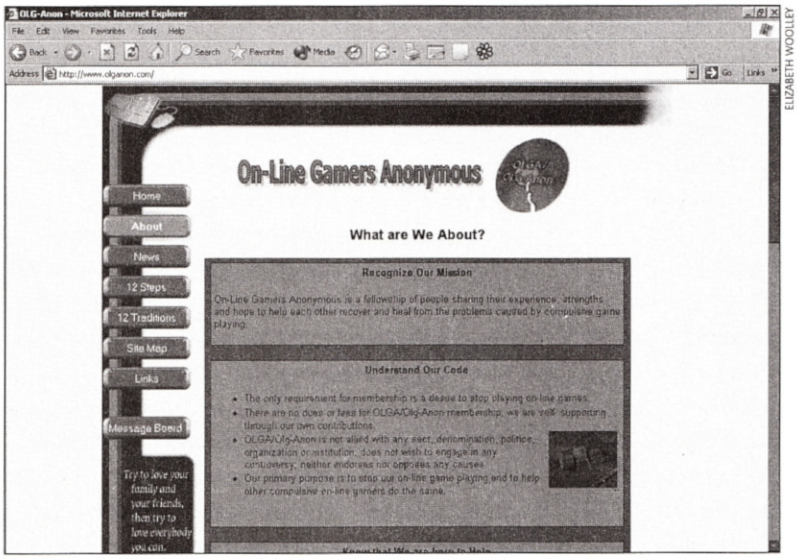
The suicide of Shawn Woolley raises serious questions about *EverQuest* addiction. The addiction is almost never fatal; indeed, the reason the game is addictive is that it fills a hole in the addict's life, or it at least gives the addict somewhere to escape the pressures of real life. And yet, a documented case exists of an *EverQuest* addict who took his own life.

Recently, another player named James Atwood of Republic, Missouri, also committed suicide, apparently over a relationship inside *EverQuest*.

Unlike Patricia Pulling two decades earlier, Elizabeth Woolley has not lost sight of reality, instead putting her energies to constructive use. She has become a major figure in *EverQuest* addiction circles, offering help wherever she can and starting a support group of her own called On-Line Gamers Anonymous (http://www.olganon.org). To recovering addicts and game widows alike, she is a friend. Her lawyer is pushing Sony to place warning labels on *EverQuest* boxes, in the hope that this will prevent others from suffering the same fate as her son (a matter in which Mrs. Woolley is skeptical), and at the time of writing, Mrs. Woolley is preparing to go to court if necessary to find out just

what happened in her son's last hours.

Will Woolley succeed in her efforts, and if so, when it comes to her lawyer's attempt with the warning labels, will they matter? These are difficult questions to answer. Sony is cautious about releasing information—and for good cause. With a hoax in the past (more than one, if you count those of other Massive Multiplayer games) and a number of hackers out there who are willing to do anything to get access to the servers of a game such as *EverQuest*, where thousands of players have their personal information stored, Sony is justified in its caution.



ELIZABETH WOOLLEY

The Online Gamers Anonymous Web site

Although the Woolley case is undoubtedly genuine, privacy is an overriding issue, and this case is not an easy one to sort out.

The warning labels, however, are unlikely to help. As mentioned, online addictions are usually triggered by something in the real world; the game provides a gripping place to escape. Labels might do some good, but since it is not the game itself causing most of the addictions, the effect would be minimal at best. The issues of addiction have had an impact on *EverQuest*'s design, however.

At Elizabeth Woolley's suggestion, Smedley had an alarm clock installed in the game. It is not a solution to the problem, as that can only come from addicts getting help from the mental health profession, but it will help to minimize the problem to some degree.

"*EverQuest* is at the vanguard, at least in North America, of this industry," Smedley said, "and we are going to have to deal with these issues head-on. It's not a comfortable position to be in—I certainly don't like having conversations with the mothers of kids who have killed themselves. It's just not a good feeling."

EverQuest addiction is something new, a close relative of Internet addiction that is barely recognized in the mental health field. A great deal remains to be learned before successful treatment is available. The questions that these controversies raise are important; they will help us determine how we treat the entire medium as it develops in the future, and in the process they'll teach us a great deal more about ourselves as human beings.

Humanity is not perfect; if it was, there would be no such thing as addiction or mental illness. One of the signs of our maturity, and the maturity of our society, lies in how we deal with our imperfections. When Irving Pulling killed himself in 1982, it resulted in a witch hunt that is now embarrassing to look back on. When Shawn Woolley pulled the trigger almost 20 years later, it helped propel an ongoing and informed search for truth. Knowledge is finally replacing scapegoating, which, when it comes to issues such as *EverQuest* addiction, is promising indeed.

ZONING OUTSIDE THE PC

CHAPTER 8

"LIGHT OR SHADOW," INTERJECTED ERIC, "NO MATTER HOW IT'S DONE, MY QUESTION REMAINS: ASSUMING THAT I HAVE A HIDDEN POWER, COULD WE DO THESE THINGS IF WE WERE REALLY BACK IN TUCSON? OR ARE WE INSTEAD IN JUST ANOTHER ONE OF AVERY'S VIRTUAL REALITIES?"

—DENNIS L. MCKIERNAN, CAVERNS OF SOCRATES

Perhaps the greatest measure of a game is in how it impacts the world around it. Not only has *EverQuest* managed to build a large community, but it has also managed to make the leap from a computer game to the outside world—in a meaningful way.

Although many aspects of the Internet are dissimilar, they are all connected, if not by the technological web, then by the people using them. Few, if any, *EverQuest* players limit themselves to playing *EverQuest*—they play other games as well. The question is often which game will influence the behavior in other games.

LANGUAGE, LANGUAGE

EverQuest has managed to have quite an impact on the gaming world. Several *EverQuest* terms have crept into the online lingo, and it is no longer uncommon to see the

word "woot," an exclamation of joy that has become synonymous with *EverQuest*, used in games ranging from *Counterstrike* to *Neverwinter Nights*.

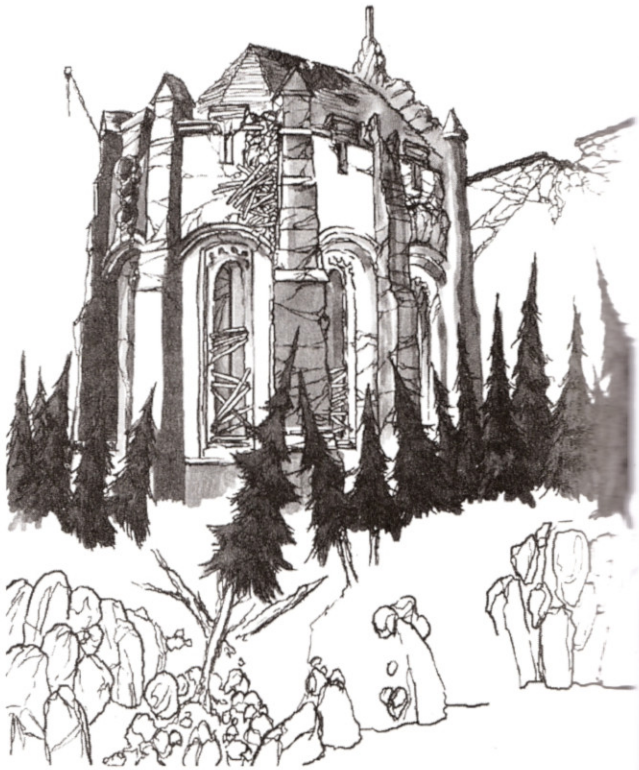
Some wonder whether the term was created in *EverQuest* or co-opted for *EverQuest* by the players. Certain terms that are commonly associated with *EverQuest*, for example, are actually terms from MUDs (such as "mobs" being used to describe creatures). New players often find themselves swamped with acronyms derived from chat rooms and MUDs, such as "OOC" (Out Of Character), "WTB" (Want To Buy), "WTS" (Want To Sell), all of which have found a home in the game, even if they were not created there. As the most famous of its generation of massively multiplayer games, many terms used in MMORPGs in general can be attributed to *EverQuest*, even though they didn't originate there.

The most famous word, "woot" was attributed to *EverQuest* so many times that it inspired Amy Bradley, a Sudbury, Ontario, based photographer and designer, to begin investigating the linguistics of the word.

"My cousin and I used it as an abbreviation of 'what a hoot' while we played on a role-playing BBS in the late '80s and '90s," Bradley said. "I started looking to see if I could find any evidence of other people using it in a similar manner."

As she began her search, Bradley found that she was inundated with theories to explain the origins of the word. One person even suggested that it came from the sound the marine from *DOOM* makes when he jumps. Whether the actual origins are directly game related remains a mystery. However, the first online appearance of the word seemed to be from a post on comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.flight-sim in September 1993 by David M. Stokes titled *AOE is INCREDIBLE!!!*

"What I found is that it was a bastardization of 'whoop,'" Bradley recalled. "There was a song it was in—I think the artist might have been Duran Duran, but I can't recall."

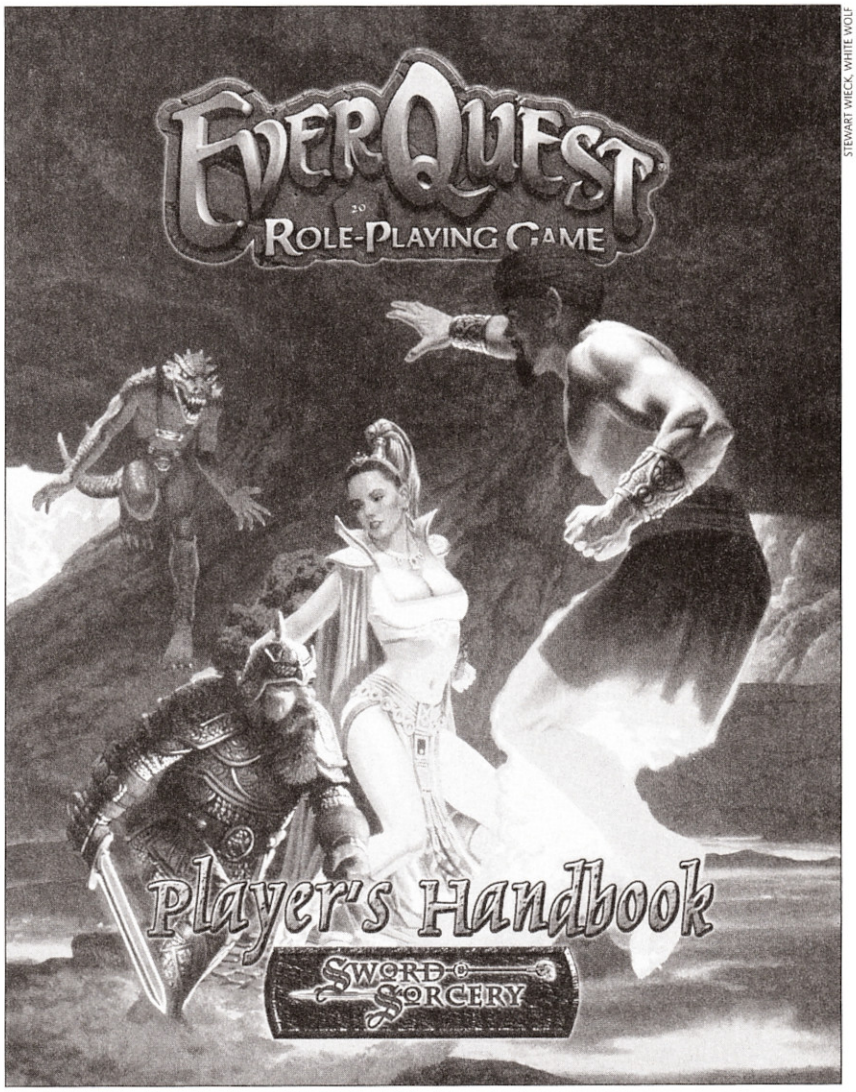


Regardless of where the word originated, it has become associated so strongly with *EverQuest* that many people don't even know where the word originated—they just know they heard it first in Norrath or from an *EverQuest* player. The word has been made famous by the game so much so that when it is used online anywhere else, the association with *EverQuest* is immediate.

It is a perfect example of the organic way in which languages develop. It is almost impossible to tell which words are going to be popularized, and by what medium. Once a new word has made an association, however, it is often iron-clad. Somebody who likes to walk cross-country can easily be called a "trekker," although the first thing that comes to my mind when the word is spoken is a certain science fiction show. If you use the word

"woot" in the middle of a *Counterstrike* game, odds are somebody's going to think that you're an *EverQuest* player. Talk about a "guild raid" on a "zone," and people will probably think you're talking about *EverQuest*.

As more words that have either originated in *EverQuest* or been popularized by the game appear on the Internet, the online language will change to include them, keeping their *EverQuest* connotations. Words are one of the first ways in which a game can influence the outside world. However, it is far from the most meaningful way.



STEWART WIECK, WHITE WOLF

White Wolf's *EverQuest RPG Player's Handbook*

EVERQUEST AT THE DINNER TABLE

When the computer game began its rise to popularity, it was a matter of the game system meeting the technology—the computer would take care of the calculations involved in a tabletop game like *Dungeons & Dragons*, while the players would be able to sit back, relax, and play.

Around 30 years after the rise of tabletop role-playing games, *EverQuest* returned to its roots with a tabletop version. A great deal of crossover between *EverQuest* fans and tabletop RPG players already existed, so when White Wolf's Sword & Sorcery Studios released the *EverQuest* game using Wizard of the Coast's D20 rules, it had a built-in audience.

Three core *EverQuest* rule books were released in late 2002 and early 2003. The first was the *Player's Handbook* that contains a brief description of Norrath, the player races and characters, skills, a brief description of the faction system, and the magic system. It was followed by *Monsters of Norrath*, which has D20 statistics on most of the monsters from the role-playing game.

The third volume, released in February 2003, is the *Game Master's Guide*, with a detailed description of the world, extended rules, magical items, a full description of the faction system, and trade skill rules.

For many players and Game Masters (GMs), it was an easy leap to go from the online world of Norrath to the tabletop version.

I was able to watch this personally as I sat in on an adventure of the Wayfarer Guardians, led by Game Master Grant Jackson.

The Guardians had just acquired some land in the first fledgling outpost of the Elves on Kunark. The group was eclectic, containing a Halfling Warrior, a Barbarian Beastlord, a couple of Spellcasters, and even a Human Shadow Knight (who was warily tolerated by the rest of the group). The Elves asked the group to see about some goblins, finally leading the party to attack a goblin camp after following some tracks.

The players were able to play the game with a minimum of fuss, drawing diagrams and maps on a large piece of graph paper whenever necessary, such as while trying to work out the tactics to use during a battle. Jackson, a GM who started playing the online version of *EverQuest* only a few months after it had been released and had played a number of tabletop game systems, was impressed with the game.

"I think the tabletop adds a lot of depth to the game," he said. "Plus, with tabletop you don't have to deal with a lot of elements that bother me with the online game."

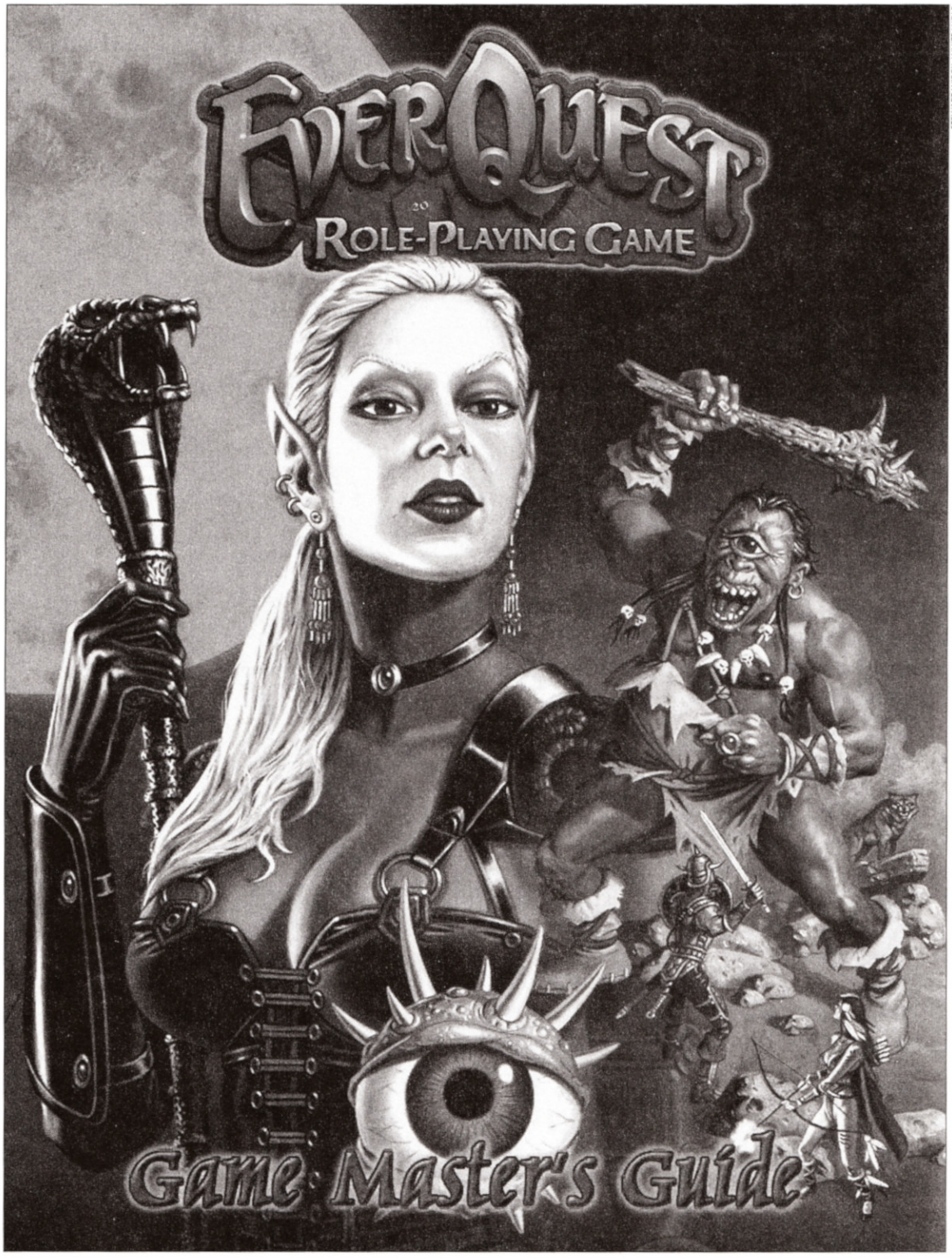
As a GM, Jackson had the most work of anybody in the group to make certain that the game went well. He'd often spend much of his free time in the days before the game preparing for the weekly meeting. However, for him the system was intuitive.

"It's fairly easy to figure out," Jackson said. "Everything is laid out nicely and D20 is fairly easy to get into. It had been a few years since I ran a game, but things are going well."

With a group of players who had all played the online game before beginning Jackson's tabletop campaign, the online version showed its influences on the offline gameplay.

"We've had tons of funny moments come up," Jackson said. "All of my players have played the online game, so some of the lingo and ways of doing things occasionally creep in—shock at seeing cows, awe at seeing mounted riders, and many, many funny moments like that about the differences in online and tabletop."

Perhaps the most telling indication of the quality of the game is Jackson's criticism. "Nothing big—just a couple of omissions. I would have liked to have had a magic item creation guideline in the *Game Master's Guide* and random monster tables. But I pretty much like things the way they are. Some more utility spells would have been



STEWART WIECK, WHITE WOLF

White Wolf's *EverQuest RPG Game Master's Guide*

nice as well, rather than straight translations of spell lists from the online game."

Although the end product is finely tuned, getting there was another story. Two designers at White Wolf headed the *EverQuest* design team—Steve and Stewart Wieck, brothers who faced the challenge of taking a well-loved and known online world, the system around it, and converting it into a format that could be used by casual role-players.

The decision to make an *EverQuest* tabletop game was made in 2001. While several of the key people at White Wolf enjoyed playing the online game, the deciding factor was far more economical—the game had to succeed in the market or it would never be made at all.

"The main factor was economics," Stewart recalled. "If we could release a product that would pull gamers from both *EverQuest* online and the successful relaunch of *Dungeons & Dragons*, then we'd have a product with a good chance of success."

The licensing turned out to be easy. Not only did the people at White Wolf like what Sony was doing with *EverQuest*, but the people at Sony liked what White Wolf had been doing with games such as *Vampire: The Masquerade*. When White Wolf asked for the license, Sony Online was more than happy to grant it.

The Wiecks put together a team of authors, game designers, and artists. While the end result was a beautiful, high-quality illustrated book, getting there turned out to be painful in certain ways.

Sony Online proved to be a willing provider of information, giving the White Wolf team just about anything they needed, including details of the mechanics behind the online game. However, transforming these mechanics into something that would work in a pen-and-paper game proved to be difficult.

"Throughout the process we continued to encounter design issues that invalidated earlier decisions and so caused us to recover ground we thought settled," Stewart remembered. "I spent a couple of months just working on the spells, and this was after two capable authors provided me with first drafts."

The materials that White Wolf was given were massive—not only did Sony provide a database of every magical item in the game, but it also provided the team with information on both old and new game zones. Stewart found himself in almost constant contact with Dan Enright, one of the designers at Sony. "Especially when I was working on the spells, I'd shoot several questions a day via e-mail to the designers and would shortly have answers."

Transforming the character classes into the D20 system proved to be more a matter of taking the attributes of each class and building a new class using the D20 rules from the ground up. With an enormous list of special abilities that each class had in the online game, it became relatively easy to adapt each character class into the new system.

ADAPTING FACTIONS

One aspect of the online game that had to be adapted was the faction system. Where in the online game the faction system is part of the game mechanics, in the pen-and-paper version a rationale behind factioning was needed. The system also had to be limited; otherwise, it would have made no sense in the context of the game.

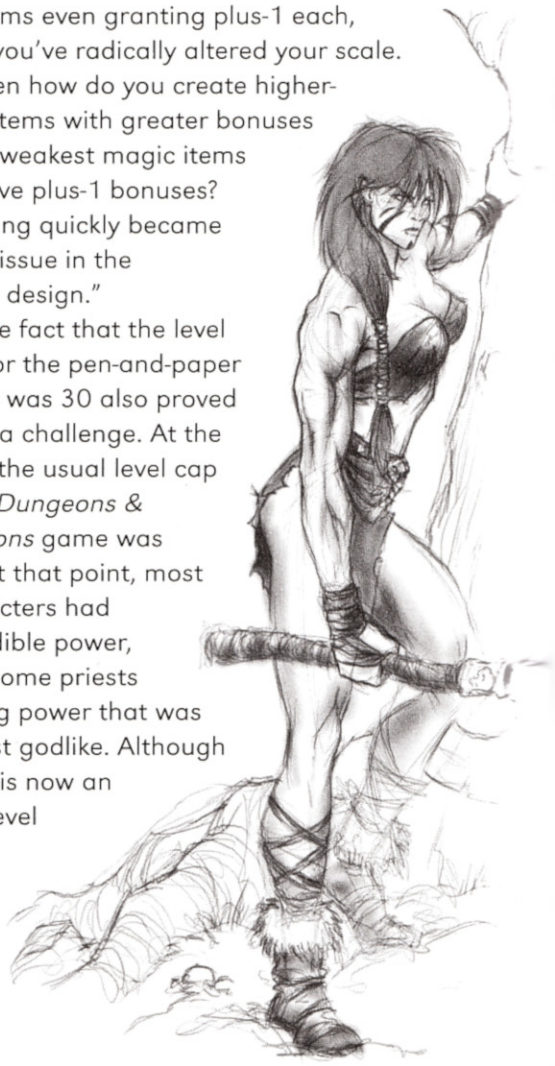
"For instance," Stewart points out, "online you could perform some relatively meaningless quest a million times and achieve a fantastic faction with a group of NPCs. In the pen-and-paper game it didn't make reasonable sense how many times you gave muffins to a guard in Qeynos: the guards would only like you a certain amount more. Nor did it seem to matter whether you killed 2 goblins or 500 of them. Either way, your faction should be pretty ruined with them."

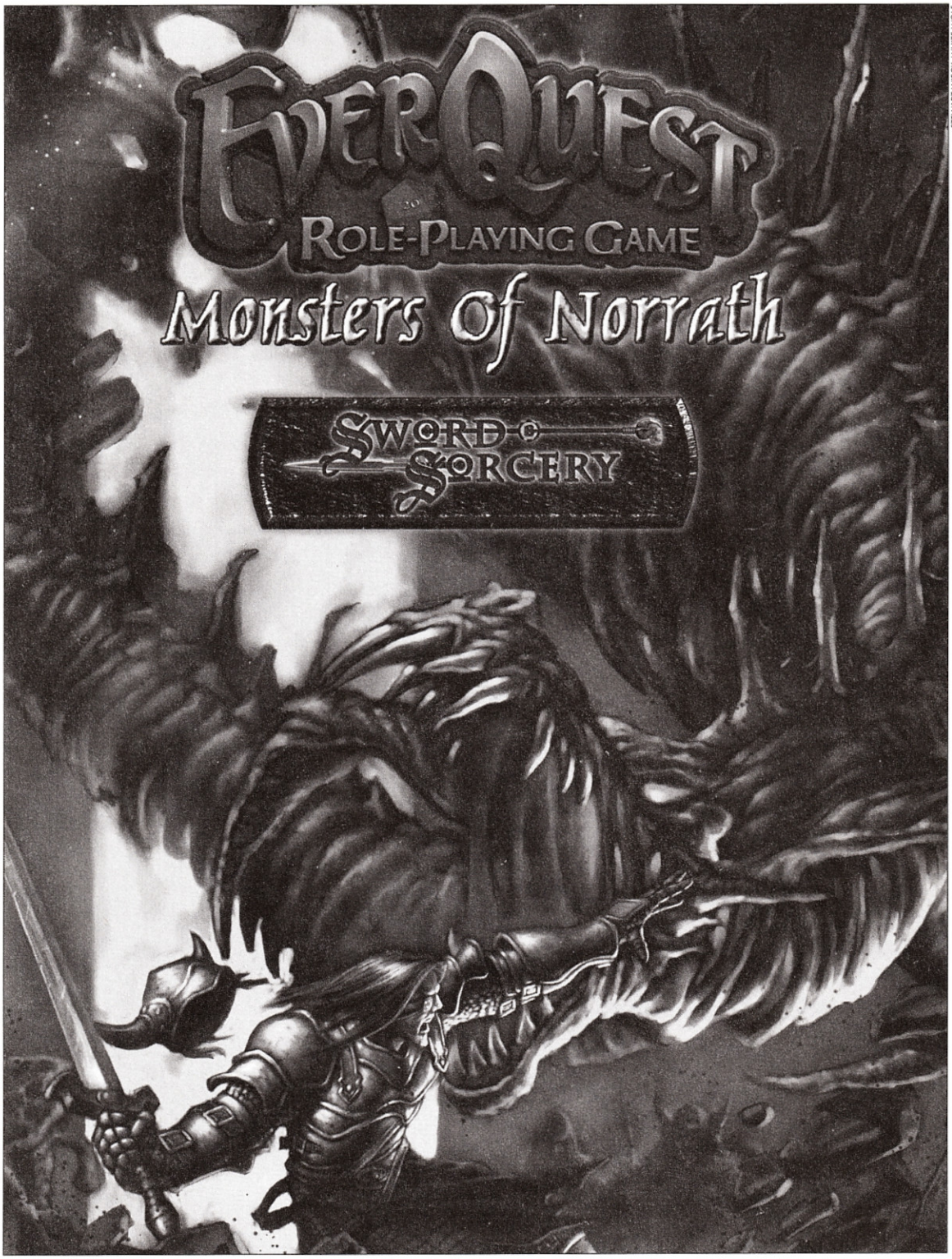
Direct translation of characters from the online realm into the tabletop game, however, with all the statistics and level ranges, proved to be difficult. Along with the online level cap being 65, many of the statistics such as strength ranged from 60 to more than 255. Both had to be translated into a system where a level 20 character had godlike powers, and a strength of 16 was considered exceptionally high. Each character class had to work in the context of the pen-and-paper game, be equally playable, and be true to the online game.

To compensate, the team created a conversion table for online characters, which was placed in the *Player's Handbook*. In addition to allowing the White Wolf team to convert the NPCs and monsters into the game system, this also permitted players who had a favorite character online to bring their characters into the tabletop game. The character level was determined by dividing by 2, while charts provided conversions for the various abilities the pen-and-paper game would require. While the system now appears simple and elegant, designing and implementing it at first was a chore.

"This really became a problem when trying to convert the slot-based equipping method of the online game and allow so many items all to grant bonuses to an attribute," Stewart said. "Online, it's no matter to have 10 items that grant strength bonuses anywhere for plus-1 to plus-10 or more, but in the pen-and-paper game if you have 10 items even granting plus-1 each, then you've radically altered your scale. So then how do you create higher-level items with greater bonuses if the weakest magic items all have plus-1 bonuses? Stacking quickly became a big issue in the game design."

The fact that the level cap for the pen-and-paper game was 30 also proved to be a challenge. At the time, the usual level cap for a *Dungeons & Dragons* game was 20—at that point, most characters had incredible power, with some priests having power that was almost godlike. Although there is now an epic-level





White Wolf's *EverQuest RPG Monsters of Norrath*

handbook to cover *Dungeons & Dragons* characters over level 20, it hadn't been published when the *EverQuest* pen-and-paper game design began. The *EverQuest* RPG was going to be going 10 levels over that, thrusting into new territory.

To keep the game balanced and interesting, the developers had to find a way of dealing with the higher levels. After all, it wouldn't be fun to play a game with no challenge.

A combination of tougher monsters to challenge the higher-level characters, doubling the experience points required to gain each new level, and high-level feats (special abilities) that would keep the character development interesting were the solutions. A level 25 Shaman, for example, would acquire a spirit mastery, or greater control over allies in the spirit world.

The biggest challenge for the designers, however, proved to be the magic system. The online game had hundreds of spells and songs, most of which had to be placed into a tabletop format. In final form, 150 pages of the finished *Player's Handbook* were dedicated to spells alone, not counting bardic songs.

The D20 rules did not use a mana-based system for magic. Many of the spells were also considerably different from the online game, and if White Wolf wanted to be true to the original *EverQuest* game, they would have to use the online spells. This meant that the developers had to find a way to make the magic system from the online game somehow fit into the tabletop rules.

Along with the pacing of mana and hit-point recovery, the vast variety of spells proved to be a challenge to incorporate.

"The main difficulties were differentiating the huge number of damage spells, since this is obviously a main function of spells online as well as providing stacking rules," Stewart said. "In the case of stacking, we were actually able in many cases to reflect how the designers at Sony Online Entertainment would prefer things to work, but because of programming issues, for example, were unable to make spells function." A major part of the online game—the trade skills that allowed a player to create magical items, bake cakes, and even make clothing—weren't ready immediately. Instead of appearing in the *Player's Handbook*, a discussion of these skills were relegated to the *Game Master's Guide*. In theory, most trade skills should have been easy in a pen-and-paper game, where the only limit is the imagination of the players. However, codifying such a system into the rules was not easy.

"The main difficulty was one of economics," Stewart said. "For example, making certain that the cost of goods versus the cost of the final product worked out in a risk versus reward method especially while working in the framework of Third Edition pricing of magic items."

Mana Points

"One big mess with potential solutions that went in a number of directions was the issue of hit point to mana (or vice versa) conversions, especially when added to spells and powers that increase the recovery rate for either of these," Stewart recalled. "A huge design issue we had to work around is that pen-and-paper games do not operate in real time as *EverQuest* online does. Therefore, to recover hit points or mana online, you actually have to sit down and 'waste time.' This is because time is the main resource online. Offline in pen-and-paper, though, time is not a resource. The passage of time can be done with the wave of a hand—for example, I sit down for an hour and recover X mana, [and] what happens after that? The manner in which we balanced this issue had ripple effects throughout the entire game."

Codifying the trade skills into the pen-and-paper game rules actually proved to add a new element to the game. It was an innovation that would allow any character to create a magical item within the context of the rules. "They create a huge motivation to adventure," Stewart said. "Now, instead of retrieving some obscure item for an NPC sage or wizard, the characters become self-motivating because *they* need a specific rare ingredient for their own work."

The game went into testing in late 2001, with a group of volunteer play testers checking to make certain that all of the game mechanics worked. This was an essential step, as it helped identify and fix some problems with class balancing and a couple of other areas.

After the *Player's Handbook*'s release, the game was received well, not only garnering several favorable reviews but also building a loyal following. This was only reinforced with the release of *Monsters of Norrath* and the *Game Master's Guide*.

"Almost everyone who compares our game with *Dungeons & Dragons* finds our rules set to be superior, and so we're winning a lot of converts," Stewart said proudly. "Now that the essential rules have been covered, we'll be adding even more to the game that will be of interest to *EverQuest* online players, such as higher-level quests that are implemented online, details on history and lore, and even entirely new areas such as Miragul's Menagerie, a new dungeon in Everfrost Peaks that was intended for use online but was never created until now, or new trade skills that appear in *Al'Kabor's Arcana*."

One resounding question is how the tabletop game will fare compared to the online juggernaut that birthed it. While it could be said that the fact that it is based on *EverQuest* will give it a great deal of longevity, there are some who are not so certain.

"Unfortunately I think it will have a fairly small part overall," Grant Jackson mused. "Mainly just as a little niche—which is a shame. It's a fine game."

In the end, the longevity of the tabletop game will probably depend on how well it can balance being true to the spirit of the online game while creating a unique experience in its own right. With enough support from White Wolf and Sony, it should be able to do just that.

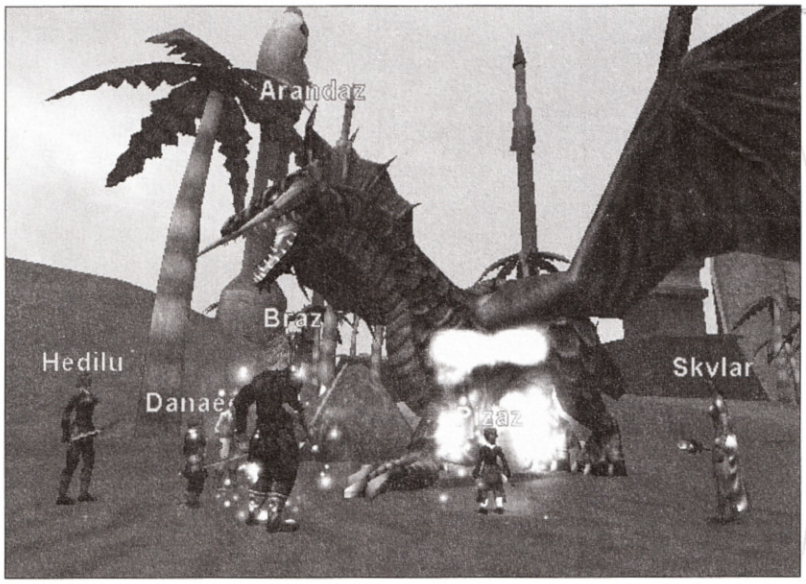
TO THE GAME CONSOLE AND BEYOND

To a degree, that it took *EverQuest* so long to release a version for the Playstation 2 is surprising. After all, both were released by branches of the same company, and both are now owned by branches of the same company. Yet it is only recently that *EverQuest Online Adventures* has allowed people to play the game using their game consoles and television sets.

This is one case in which the game truly has broken new ground—the first console-based MMORPG in the United States. Game consoles capable of accessing the Internet are a new phenomenon, and many companies, such as Microsoft and Sony, are only just now taking advantage of it. Launched in February 2003, *EverQuest Online Adventures* is based around the Playstation 2 using the console's network adapter. The game is set 500 years before the original, back when Antonica was known as Tunaria, allowing Sony to provide an untouched environment for the players to access.

"We are big believers that online gaming is a genre all its own," John Smedley said. "It should transcend the platform it is on. We thought that *EverQuest Online Adventures* would reach gamers that *EverQuest* did not, and we're seeing that—there's a very small crossover rate between *EverQuest* and EQOA. We're reaching new people."

The console format has some advantages and disadvantages compared to the PC format. The system requirements for the *EverQuest* PC game tend to be quite steep, requiring a computer with at least 512 MB of RAM just to have the texture mapping work at its best. The PC game also has to deal with the limitless system configurations, which can sometimes cause unexpected glitches in the gameplay as a piece of hardware doesn't act quite as the designers thought it would. When it comes to a console such as the PS2, the hardware is constant and



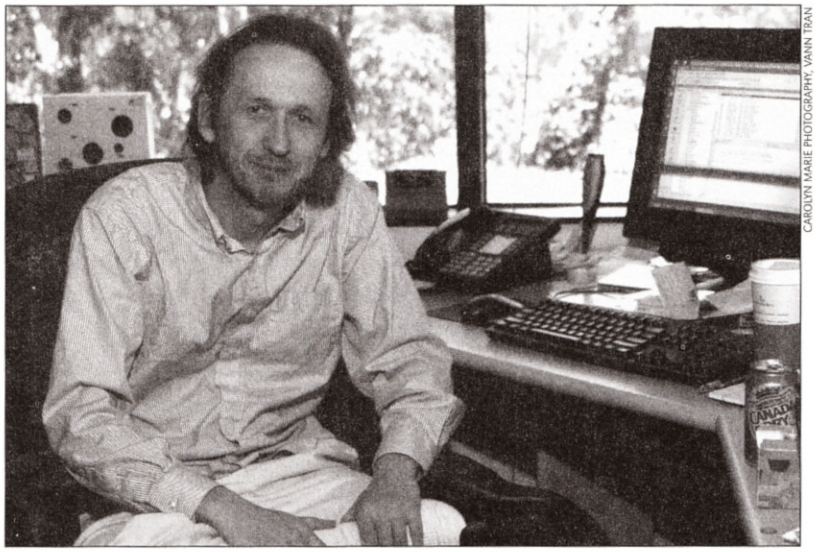
EverQuest Online Adventures—adventurers fight a dragon

far easier to program for. Also, a Playstation 2 is far less expensive than a modern computer, opening up a much wider, albeit sometimes slower selling, market for the game.

However, most consoles do not have certain features that are standard on a computer, such as a keyboard and mouse. Because of limited hard drive space, if any at all, many of the games must be far simpler and more streamlined than their computer-based counterparts. Additionally, the Playstation 2 has only 32 megabytes of RAM, severely limiting the graphics of the game. They must also deal with television set resolution, which generally cannot handle high resolutions. For example, if you hook your computer up to your television set, most of the text on your screen will be difficult, at best, to read. This means that the game engine has to deal with several constraints of hardware, particularly when the key strength of the game is in building communities.

To meet this challenge, Smedley hired Rod Humble, the developer of a game titled *Subspace*, onto the project. Smedley and Humble had worked together on a prior game while Humble had his own game development studio, with Smedley outsourcing to them. However, Humble's studio had gone deep into debt, and while Humble was trying to pitch a game titled *Infantry* to him, Smedley took the opportunity to bring his friend onto the team.

EverQuest Online Adventures concept art—a troll



CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY, VANN TRAN

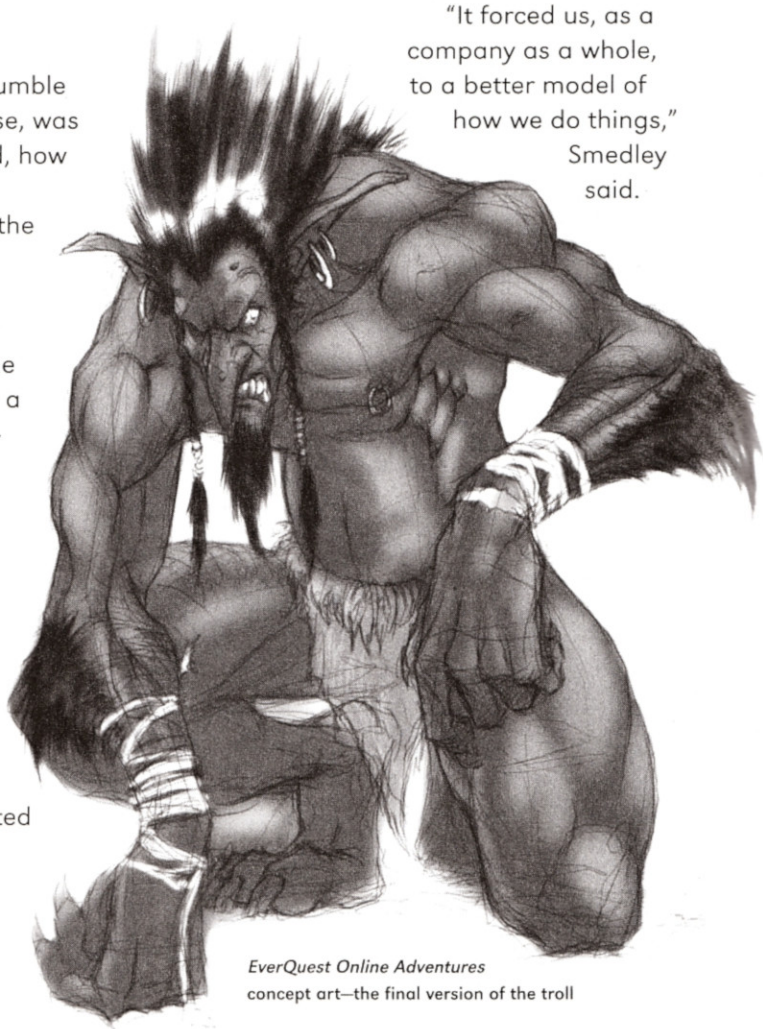
Rod Humble

"It was extremely challenging," Humble said. "The biggest challenge, of course, was communications—without a keyboard, how do players talk to each other?"

To get around the social aspects, the developers programmed in a virtual keyboard, allowing players without a USB keyboard to key in messages to the people around them. Although the process is slower than it would be on a computer, it does allow the conversations that are the strength of *EverQuest*. However, even Humble now suggests that if you want to chat in the game, the best way is to buy a keyboard.

Although TV resolution was limiting, the standardized graphics proved to be a great advantage to the development team. When the game was released on February 12, 2003, one or two reviewers commented on how much of an improvement the graphics were over the original release of *EverQuest*. Another few noticed that the graphics weren't quite as crisp as the original game. It wasn't that the graphics were a quantum leap forward (they don't look as good as the graphics for the current PC version), it was more a combination of the graphics finally able to be optimized for a platform, along with the unpatchable nature of the graphics, that forced Sony Online to ensure that they had the best product possible right in the box.

"It forced us, as a company as a whole, to a better model of how we do things," Smedley said.



EverQuest Online Adventures
concept art—the final version of the troll

The reception among reviewers was somewhat mixed but mostly positive, with an average rating of 77.5 percent for 44 reviews at Gamerankings.com (a site that collects reviews from magazines and online sites). *EverQuest Online Adventures* was an MMORPG for the console, and it had many of the starting problems typical for that type of game. In the beginning, the players were few and far between, leaving some reviewers wandering around wondering where everybody was. Several players were also trying to complete the same quests at once, resulting in line-ups as players waited for a monster to respawn so that they could take their shot at

The EverQuest Online Adventures graphics engine—a close-up of characters fighting

killing it. Most of the bad reviews concentrated on the *EverQuest* equivalent of a single-player experience, which missed the point of the game. Several reviewers commented, however, that while the game was a good porting of the MMORPG to the console format, it seemed to be designed for fans of the MMORPG. This has not limited the game's audience, however—as of the end of May 2003, the game had a little less than 50,000 subscribers and was still growing, a giant leap for any console-based multiplayer game, particularly one that was trying to introduce the idea of paying a monthly fee to a virgin market.

Patching a Playstation 2 Game

One of the bigger challenges included the fact that the game had to manage without a hard disk at all, forcing the team to compress everything as much as possible. An even greater problem, however, was finding a way to patch the game for bugs and gameplay balance. For about six months, Humble and his team presented a demo of the game to superiors in Sony, without knowing whether they could ever find a way to implement a patch.

"We assured everybody we were going to solve it," Humble chuckled. "But, nevertheless, we actually had no clue."

Humble and his team finally found a solution, however—by launching an executable off a memory card, they could implement a patch. This raised a number of issues with Sony's legal department, as a similar technique was used by software pirates to make copies of Playstation games.

"Sony has a list of things you can't do with the Playstation 2," Humble explained. "Not surprisingly, launching executables they haven't approved is near the top of the list—and we were saying, 'Hey, we're just going to use this technique that people can use to rip off Sony games. Is this a problem?' That raised a few eyebrows, but eventually we got through it."

The *EverQuest Online Adventures* experience is slightly different from that of the PC version. Unlike the PC version, no player-versus-player combat or trade skills were included in the initial release, forcing the game to revolve around killing monsters and socializing. The customization of the visual look of

the player characters was also scaled down to four faces per player race. The combat system was refined, however, allowing players to control the blows that their characters swing at the monsters. Other refinements were included—the experience point loss from the PC version was altered so that players wouldn't be in danger of losing levels from dying. The loading times between zones was removed completely. To avoid long travel times, it was also made possible for players to hitch rides with NPCs.

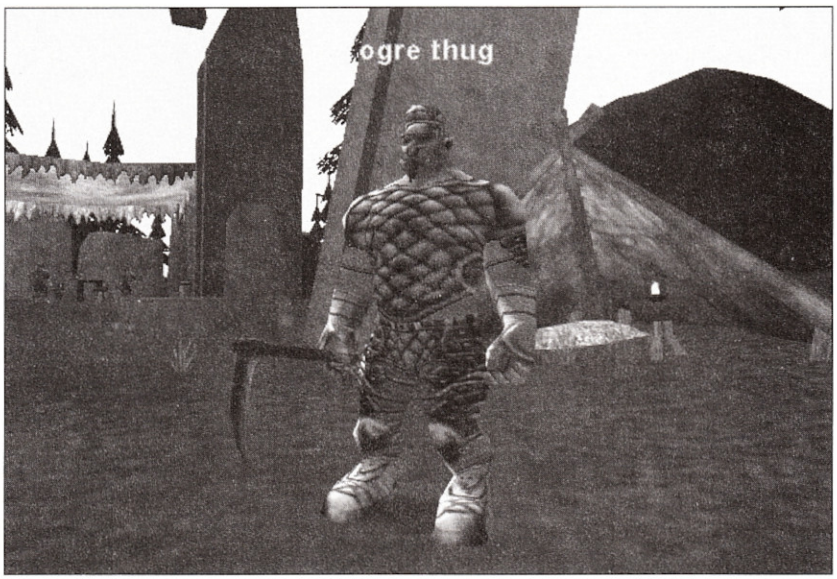
"As an experience, it's a little bit lighter," Smedley said. "The people who play it can play shorter hours, and it's a new experience for them."

For Humble, the game still stands as something as an experiment. "I think [ten years from now] people will say here is where we got an idea if games of this scale will work on the console. Because it's so ground-breaking, it's going to answer a lot of questions that people have."

EverQuest Online Adventures was successful enough that Sony began work on an second edition titled *Frontier*, with a release date of winter 2003. Unlike the PC version of *EverQuest*, a Playstation 2 update could not use an expansion format, where the extra areas are just added on to the existing game. Instead, *Frontier* is being developed as a game in its own right, where players can visit the zones from *EverQuest Online Adventures* and even chat and interact with players using the original EQOA.

However, *Frontier* has used the experi-

ence learned from the development of the first Playstation version to good effect—the game has new models, classes, and races, and enhanced graphics. The trade skills missing in the first edition are also being added to the second, allowing the game to come closer to the original *EverQuest* experience. A new auction system will allow the in-game economy to flourish, as players will be able to create and sell items in an environment similar to eBay.



An ogre thug from *EverQuest Online Adventures: Frontier*

"It's a great time for new players to come in," said Todd Carson, *Frontier*'s associate producer. "The game looks really good now. It's our second time around, our second edition—we've had a chance to improve upon things that we thought needed some improvement."

Not to be undone, in late 2002 Sony also ported the *EverQuest* world to the Pocket PC. Unlike the previous games, this was a single-player experience, where the player could select one of four character classes and then adventure out to save Norrath from an army of undead. The game is still being released in a number of stand-alone chapters, with the first set in Freeport and the second in Qeynos.

The second biggest change was the interface. Where *EverQuest* had previously used a 3D interface, this wasn't possible for the Pocket PC. So the developers used an isometric 2D interface reminiscent of games such as *The Four Crystals of Trazere*. Rather than being a translation of the online experience, it was more an adaptation of the game world to a new format.

Fighting a bear in *EverQuest* for Pocket PC

For the Pocket PC game, Sony brought in an outside developer named Emodiv, Inc., with the final development team consisting of Robert Hill as the game's producer, a programmer, and an artist. With the small size of the game, the three-person team was ideal for the project.

"It was a much shorter development cycle," said Hill, "just due to the fact that we had limitations on the hardware, in that we couldn't use huge amounts of memory—this really restricted the type of role-playing game we could use, which drastically brought down the development cycle."

Sony took *EverQuest* one step further by expanding it to wireless phones. In January 2002, Sony and QUALCOMM announced that they would be developing *EverQuest: Hero's Call* for wireless phones with the Binary Runtime Environment for Wireless, or BREW. Like the Pocket PC game, *Hero's Call* was created by a three-person team, with a programmer and artist who were contracted out.

CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY, VANN TRAN

Robert Hill

CAROLYN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY, VANN TRAN

Matt Yaney

"We had been looking at the market for quite a while," said Matt Yaney, the producer of *Hero's Call*, "and we thought there was a lot of potential there. We like to be market leaders, not market followers, so we tried to be early adapters at the first reasonable moment."

This format placed even more severe technological restrictions on the development team, who had to find a way of transporting the *EverQuest* experience over to a medium that was on the same level as home computers such as the TI-99/4A and the Commodore 64. 3D graphics were out of the question. So was real-time play.

"The main thing that you're fighting is the hardware," Yaney commented. "You're trying to cram so much onto a tiny device, which adds to the overall difficulty level of creating the title. However, the development cycle is much shorter, because it's a much smaller game. It's just a matter of squeezing it all onto the phone and taking the *EverQuest* intellectual property and turning it into an experience."

EverQuest Hero's Call—fighting goblins

In the end, the developers decided to use a turn-based system instead, allowing for the fact that most people playing on wireless phones were likely to be interrupted, and for that matter they would be unlikely to be playing for more than 10 minutes at a time. To keep the game reasonable for this style of play, the game was broken up into several smaller objectives within the main quest, along with three slots for saved games. The graphics were similar to *EverQuest* for the Pocket PC but at a lower resolution, with an art style strongly influenced by Shigeru Miyamato, who created Mario for Nintendo. To fit on a graphically limited device with low resolution, the art had to have bright colors and accentuated features. Like the Pocket PC version, *Hero's Call* was single-player.

For Yaney, however, the main importance of the game is far from a technological one. "The main thing about this title is that the story ties into *EverQuest Online Adventures* and *EverQuest II*, so there is some history in there that you can find out about, and some of the towns that you can travel to in some fashion or another are in the other games."

Looking at the expansion of *EverQuest* products to different platforms, Smedley sees a promising beginning more than anything else. "I think this is all the start of a very powerful franchise. We want to build on

this and turn it into a franchise that will last a very long time, and span generations of platforms."

GETTING INTO PICTURES

With games such as *Diablo* and *Warcraft* expanding out into the world of books and comics, it is not surprising that *EverQuest* has done precisely the same thing. Brad McQuaid and Jim Lee began work in 1999, bringing the continent of Kunark to life in a comic book published by Wildstorm.

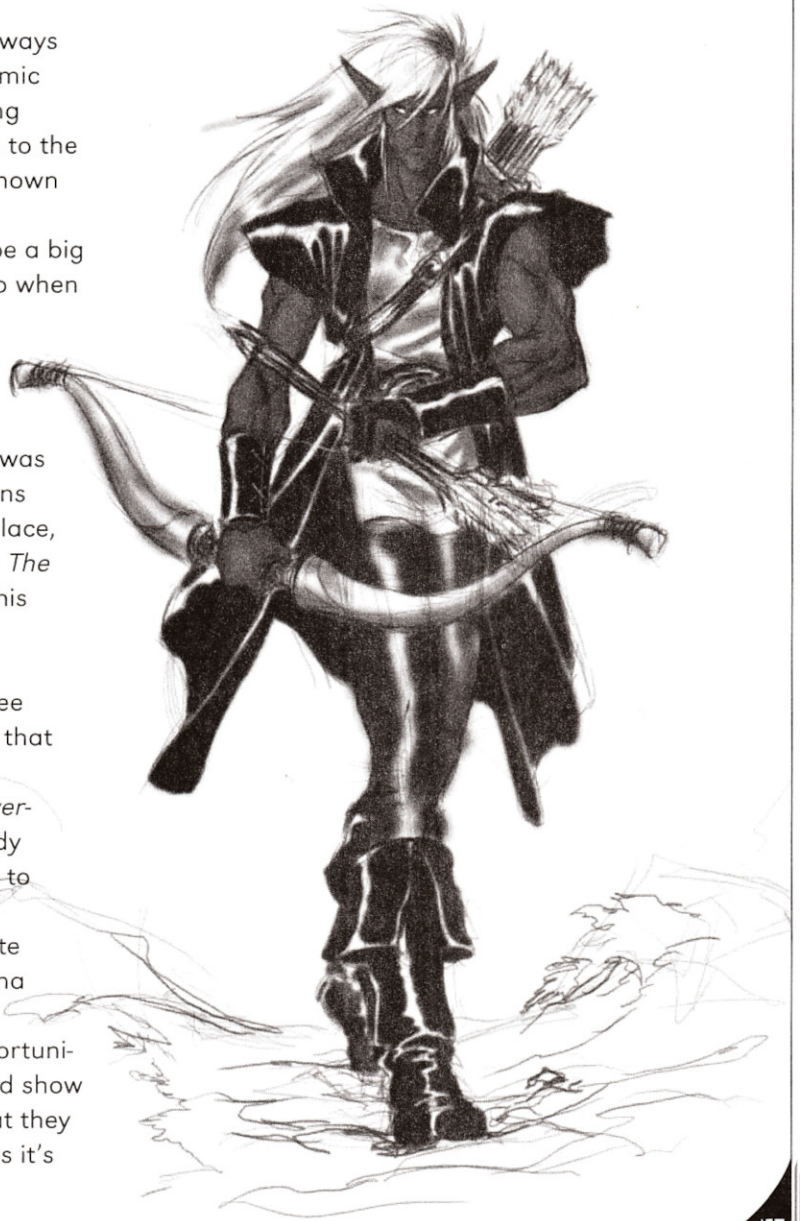
Verant had been looking into new ways of telling the *EverQuest* story, with comic books being only one possibility among many. The idea of a comic book came to the fore when McQuaid met Lee, a well-known comic book artist.

"When we met, Lee turned out to be a big *EverQuest* fan," McQuaid recalled. "So when we hooked up and started talking, it made a lot of sense at that point to do a comic book."

The setting of the book was mainly influenced by where the game was at the time. As the contract negotiations between Verant and Wildstorm took place, *EverQuest* had just been released and *The Ruins of Kunark* was on the horizon. This made Kunark a natural setting for the new endeavor.

For the back-story, McQuaid and Lee looked at the background information that had been put together for the Kunark expansion by other members of the *EverQuest* team, some of which had already been used by the *EverQuest* Live team to introduce the Kunark expansion to the player base. Then they began to cowrite the book, telling the story of how Firiona Vie rediscovered Kunark.

For Verant, it was a wonderful opportunity to expand the *EverQuest* mythos and show the players a bit more of the world that they wouldn't have seen before. "Sometimes it's hard in a massively multiplayer game to really communicate the storyline to the player," McQuaid said. "Since it's an open-ended world, the player doesn't have to go on a certain quest or be exposed to a certain storyline—only catching pieces of the story in the game. By adding other forms of text, such as books, comic books, and the like, it provides more of a foundation for a back-story that adds more realism and depth to the world."



For McQuaid, a long-time comic book fan, cowriting the comic was a process filled with exploration and discovery.

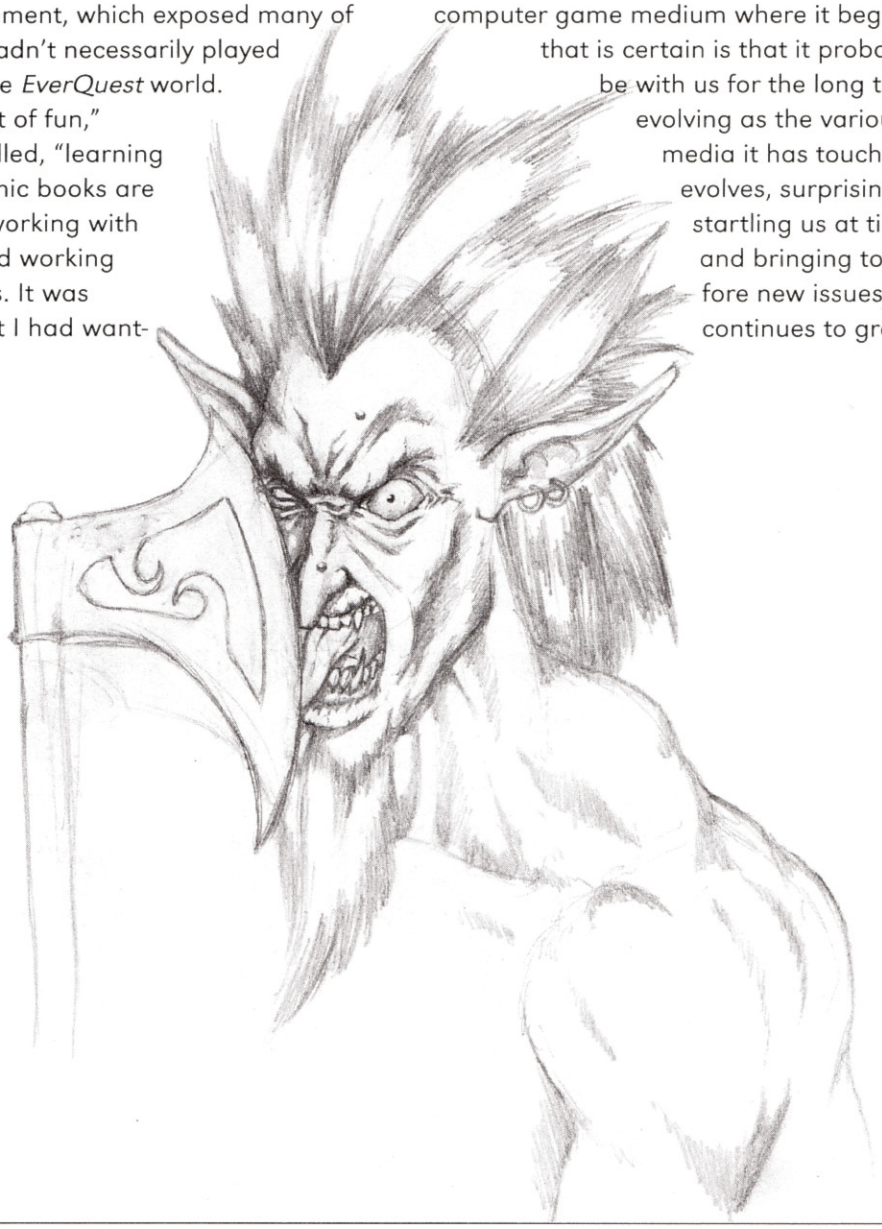
"We got together a few times for lunch and plotted it," McQuaid said. "Then Jim drew a rough draft of the comic book and gave me those images, and I worked on the actual dialogue. Once I filled in the dialogue, and the general text and flow of the comic book, it went to the editors at Wildstorm and I worked with them to finalize the story."

The comic book did well, partly because of Lee's involvement, which exposed many of his fans who hadn't necessarily played the game to the *EverQuest* world.

"It was a lot of fun," McQuaid recalled, "learning about how comic books are put together, working with the editors, and working with the artists. It was something that I had wanted to be involved with since I was a kid."

The comic book may be only the beginning, however. Sony Pictures, which owns Sony Online Entertainment, is beginning to look at taking the *EverQuest* franchise to a new level. Although nothing has been set, Smedley has said that an *EverQuest* movie project is currently under the microscope for full funding from the media giant.

Where *EverQuest* goes from here is difficult to say. It has taken on a life of its own, with several successful leaps away from the computer game medium where it began. All that is certain is that it probably will be with us for the long term, evolving as the various media it has touched evolves, surprising and startling us at times, and bringing to the fore new issues as it continues to grow.

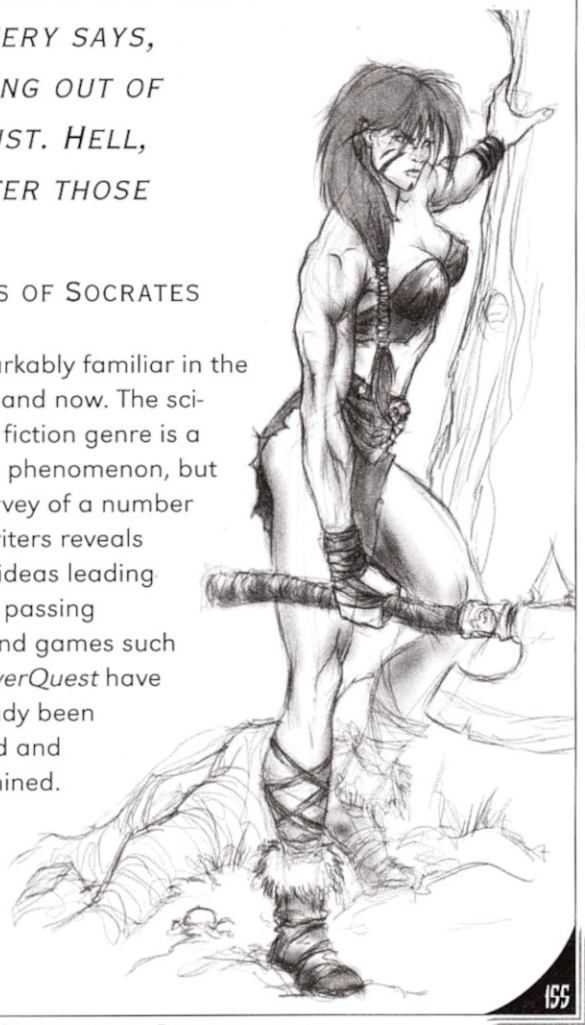


STARING INTO THE CRYSTAL BALL

CHAPTER 9

ALICE SHOOK HER HEAD IN DISBELIEF. "YOU MEAN YOU ARE USING AN HONEST-TO-GOD ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE MERELY TO RUN A GAME?"
"NOT A GAME, MISS MAXON," REPLIED PERRY. "NOT A GAME. INSTEAD IT IS A WHOLE NEW REALITY. A WHOLE NEW EXISTENCE. AS AVERY SAYS, ADVENTURE, ROMANCE, THE ACTING OUT OF EVERY DESIRE, SATING EVERY LUST. HELL, BEFORE LONG PEOPLE WILL PREFER THOSE REALITIES TO THIS."

—*DENNIS L. MCKIERNAN,* CAVERNS OF SOCRATES



Back when I was discussing this chapter with some of my friends, one of them asked me, "Isn't it difficult to predict the future?"

"Not really," I replied with a smile. "Predicting the future is easy. It's getting it *right* that's hard."

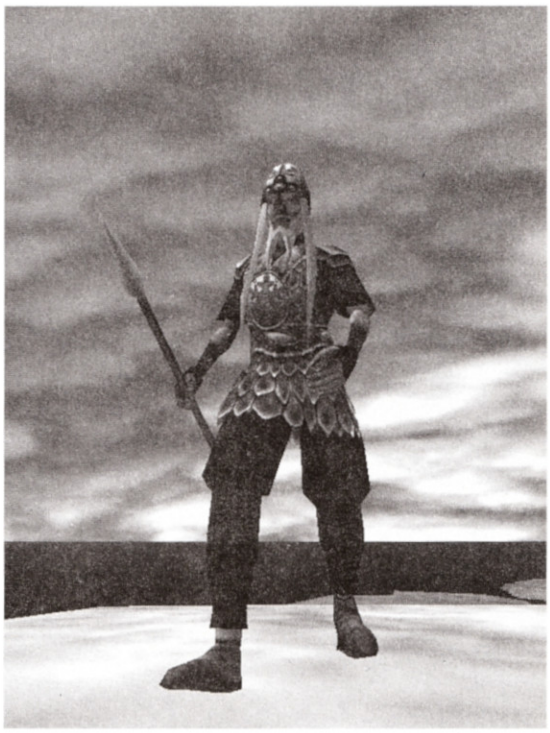
And that is the crux of the matter. Technology changes, new ideas arise, and sometimes the usual baby steps of progress become giant leaps. You can never really tell where the future is going to take you, but sometimes you can make an educated guess.

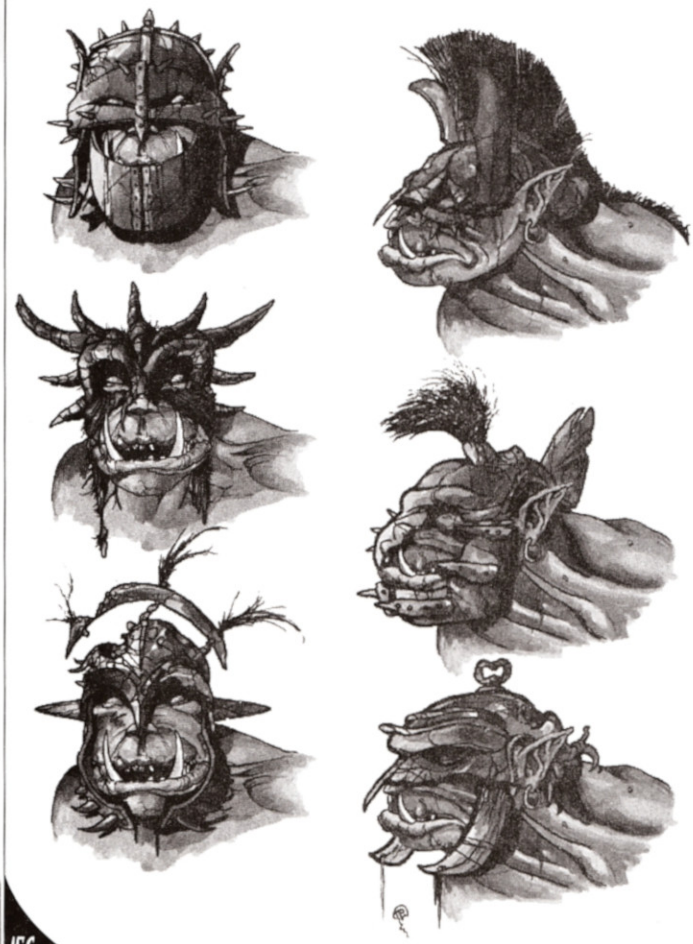
PREDICTIONS OF THE FUTURE

For quite a while, science fiction writers have been exploring concepts that seem remarkably familiar in the here and now. The science fiction genre is a huge phenomenon, but a survey of a number of writers reveals that ideas leading to or passing beyond games such as *EverQuest* have already been noted and examined.

One of the more remarkable stories was published in 1967. *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream*, by Harlan Ellison, has sometimes been called the first cyberpunk story. It is a dark tale; set after a devastating World War III, it follows the last five living human beings on earth, who are trapped inside the belly of a giant computer named AM. It turns out that AM became sentient and then grew insanely jealous because human beings could move around and be free, while it could only exist. So it used its power to escalate the war to the point where humanity was destroyed, with the exception of the five people who brought it into sentience, who it tries to torment for all eternity.

The story has quite a few remarkable features. Despite having been written long before virtual reality was realized in its most





primitive form, the torture of the five survivors seems to be taking place in such a reality. AM is able to bring godlike power to bear, prolonging life, altering reality at a whim, and changing the physical form of its prisoners.

Science fiction writing post virtual reality has often used variations on the idea to explore the potential of computer games, particularly the future of multiplayer games and persistent worlds. *Killobyte*, by Piers Anthony, took a head-on look at a potential future involving multiplayer games and virtual reality.

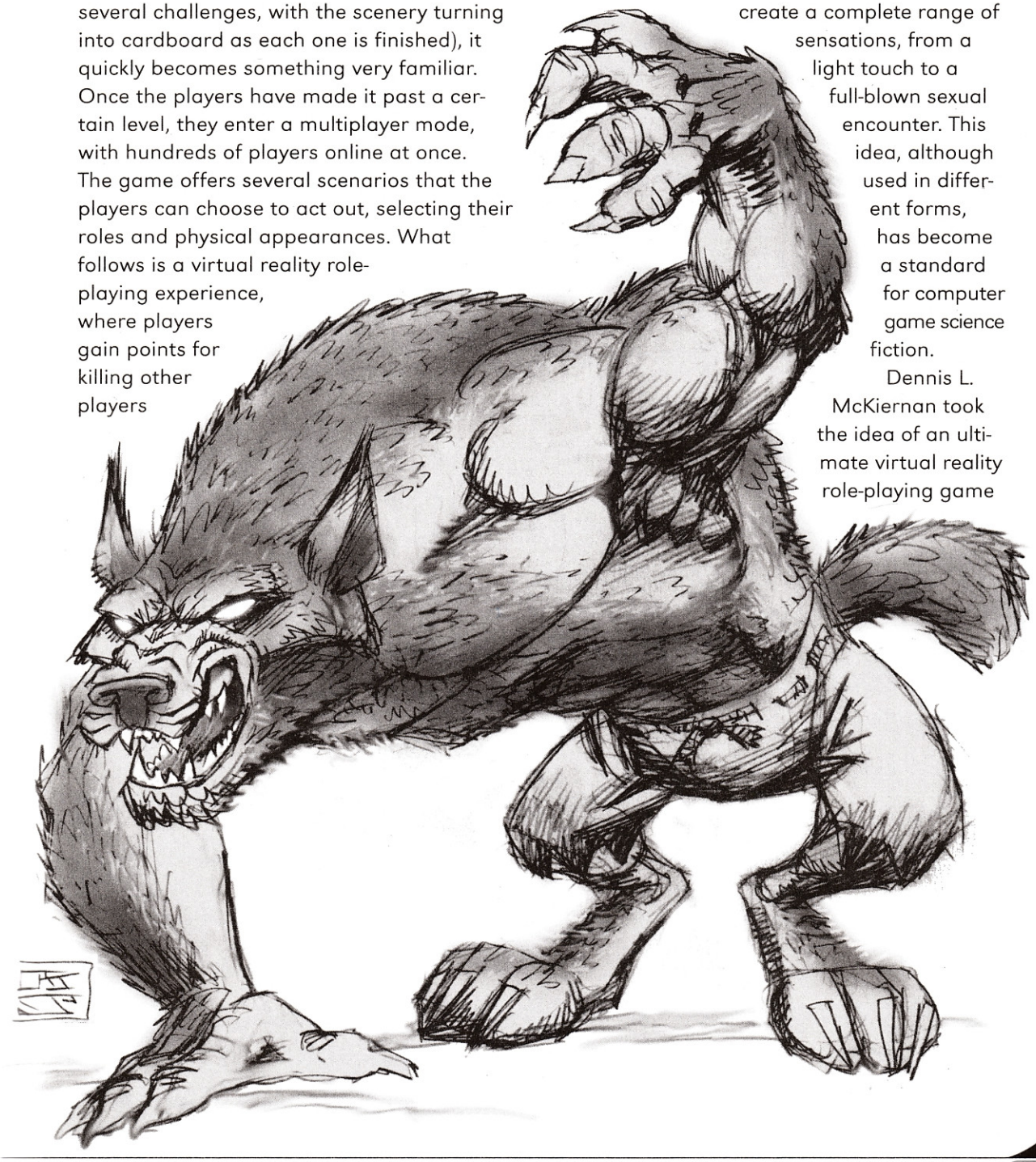
Published in 1993, the book was about a multiplayer virtual reality computer game named *Killobyte*. A player named Walter Toland, who in the game is a fully functional human being, but in real life is physically paralyzed, becomes trapped in the game when he comes across a hacker named Phreak, who torments Toland as he moves through the game world. Unfortunately, every time

Tolland dies in the game, the game's way of telling his body affects his pacemaker, putting his real life into jeopardy.

Although the reader's first glance at the *Killobyte* game may seem a bit abstract (the player must work his or her way through several challenges, with the scenery turning into cardboard as each one is finished), it quickly becomes something very familiar. Once the players have made it past a certain level, they enter a multiplayer mode, with hundreds of players online at once. The game offers several scenarios that the players can choose to act out, selecting their roles and physical appearances. What follows is a virtual reality role-playing experience, where players gain points for killing other players and achieving goals in the scenarios. After a certain number of points, the player moves up to the next level.

The game itself seems omnipotent at times. It is capable of holding a player to his or her alignment, and it can create a complete range of sensations, from a light touch to a full-blown sexual encounter. This idea, although used in different forms, has become a standard for computer game science fiction.

Dennis L. McKiernan took the idea of an ultimate virtual reality role-playing game



The Cave of Socrates

For those who have never heard of "Socrates' Cave," here is a brief description. Imagine that you, along with several other people, are in a cave and have been there all your life. Behind you is a light, which casts shadows onto the wall before you. All you have ever been able to see are the shadows. Now, if you escaped from this cave, how would you come to grips with actual reality? And, for that matter, if you returned to the cave to tell the others what you had seen, how could you possibly make them believe you?

a step further with his 1995 novel *Caverns of Socrates*. The story centered on a role-playing group invited to test out a prototype artificial intelligence dedicated to creating the ultimate game. Through a neural interface, not only are the players able to experience everything in the game literally, but they also become their characters; their real lives and identities are temporarily forgotten, and they actually live the game.

Naturally, something goes wrong. Avery, the AI running the game, is damaged by a bolt of lightning during a storm, trapping all of the players inside the game. Indeed, the game becomes so real that an in-game death is fatal in reality.

The general idea of the ultimate game remains the same in both of these books. The player is able to experience the game as though it is actually happening, and each player can interact with other players. Although the game in *Caverns of Socrates* does not have the multiplayer scope of the *Killobyte* game, the technology and idea behind it are both a bit more advanced. McKiernan, however, also takes a philosophical bent, using the story to question the nature of reality and explore Plato's concepts of how we perceive reality.

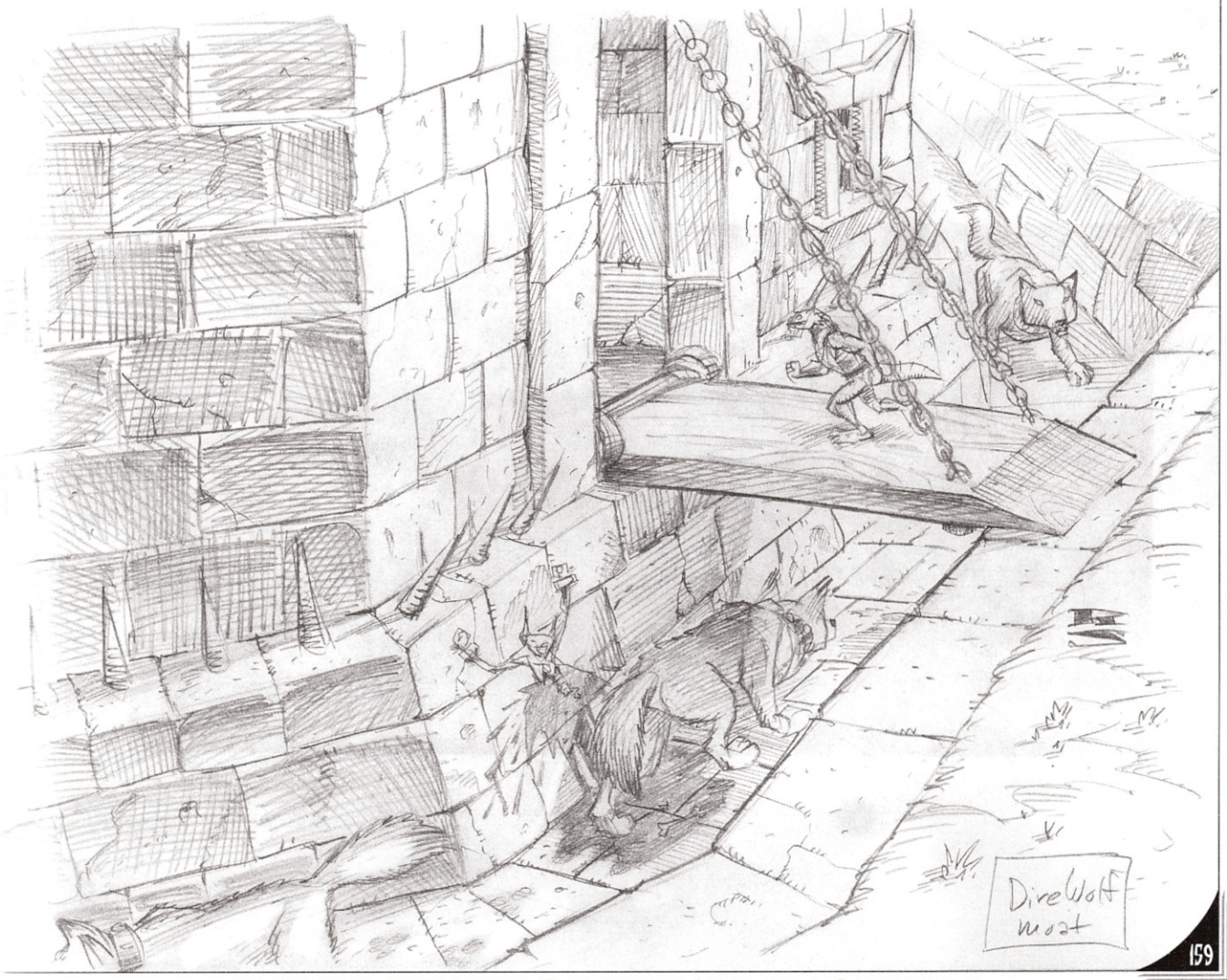
At least two authors took the idea of the ultimate game and merged it with the Internet. Both Tad Williams and Mark Fabi wrote computer game science fiction, although each used a different setting. Fabi's 1998 book *Wyrm* was set on the eve of the twenty-first century, while Williams's series *Otherland*, published between 1996 and 2001, was set in a future society, perhaps 30 years ahead of our own.

Wyrm combined millennial paranoia with computer game technology and the Internet. The story begins with Michael Arcangelo, a computer virus hunter, who finds something strange in a chess program. As the story unfolds, he discovers that a large worm containing a computer game has managed to spread itself over the Internet and is using the entire network to power itself.

The game in *Wyrm* is an interesting one; it is based on Multi-User Dungeons, but with a graphical interface—and, it later turns out, support for a neural interface. There is something menacing about the game, although the main characters can't work out exactly what. As they play through it, they find that they are able to acquire a "key" that allows them to enter other MUDs with their character powers intact.

The players learn that the game is sentient and ready to do whatever it needs to protect itself, including causing a nuclear war. They end up bringing together an army of thousands of MUD players and hackers to fight against the computer, while Arcangelo uses a neural interface to fight the battle. However, as in the other novels, if he dies in the game, it is also possible that he will die in real life.

If *Wyrm* contains shades of an MMORPG toward the end of the book, Williams's *Otherland* pushes the idea of a developed

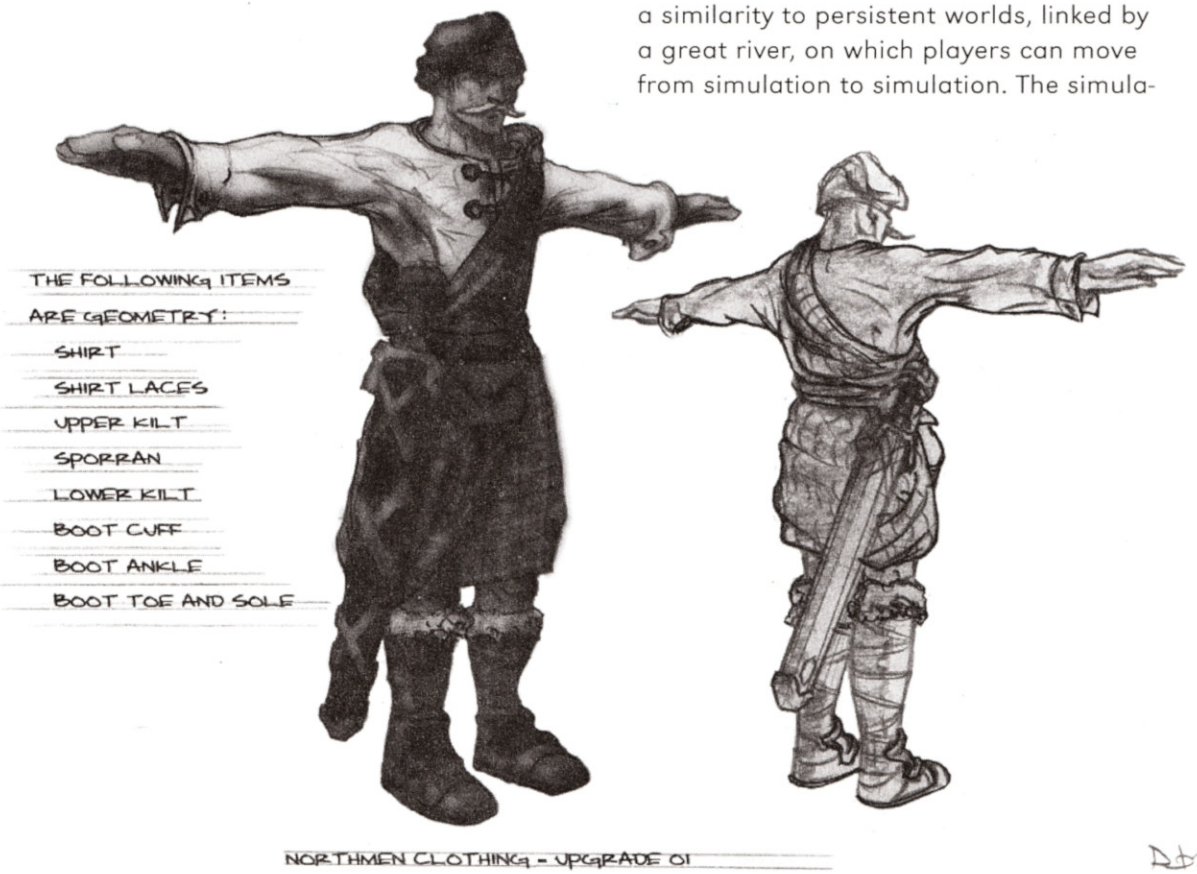


virtual-reality–persistent world right into the open. *Otherland* is massive, a four book set that may well be the Internet-inspired equivalent of *Lord of the Rings*. Unfolding about 3500 to 4000 pages in total (depending on whether it is paperback or hardcover), *Otherland* tracks several characters as they infiltrate a secret network through the future Internet. In these books, the Internet is completely VR based, but children are going online and then going into comas. Once the characters manage to get into the Otherland network, they find that they cannot disconnect by themselves, nor can they get any word to the outside world; they must work their way through the network and its hazards, where, as with the other stories, death online is fatal in the real world.

An entire book could be written about the vision of *Otherland* alone. Two networks of note, the Internet itself and the Otherland network, are essentially MMORPGs.

The Internet uses the virtual reality interface to place the user in a sort of overarching persistent world. In this world, it is possible to go to a number of different locations. If, for example, a user wants to play a role-playing game, they merely have to go to a portal to a game, log in, and start playing, all while using the same virtual reality interface. The game that Williams describes, the Middle Country, is in and of itself a persistent world. Once players finish their experience in the game, they then move back up to the Internet, where they can go to another portal and play something else. Every user has an avatar that can be customized, allowing players to appear to others exactly as they wish in the virtual world.

The Otherland network lies beneath the Net. It is a series of simulations, all bearing a similarity to persistent worlds, linked by a great river, on which players can move from simulation to simulation. The simula-



tions have great variety, with realistic constructs that may, or may not, be the comatose children. Settings range from World War I to the pyramids of ancient Egypt. In some cases, the simulations are used for study; in the second book, the main characters come across some scientists studying insects in the network. Like in the Internet above, the denizens of the Otherland network have an avatar, although those who have broken into the network cannot change it by themselves.

The idea of the future of persistent worlds has also been explored on television and in film. Chris Carter, who created *The X-Files*, also created a short-lived series titled *Harsh Realm*, which was a futuristic version of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* set in a virtual reality game. Of course, the players were trapped.

In 1999, three films were released exploring the nature of reality through the idea of the virtual world. *The Matrix*, directed by the Wachowski brothers, had a persistent world simulating the late twentieth century. Not only were real people trapped in the "game," they weren't even aware it *was* one.

The Thirteenth Floor was a murder-mystery in which a laboratory created a virtual world, and then something seemed to have escaped from it. At the end of the film, it turned out that reality wasn't as it seemed.

The most notable of the three films, however, was *eXistenZ*, written and directed by David Cronenberg. This featured another version of the ultimate computer game, in this case based on biotechnology. The question of the film seemed to be "at what point is the game too real?" *eXistenZ* stands out for a couple of reasons; not only does it actively question how our lives are affected by the games we play, but the background of the film had an anti-game terrorist movement that demanded that the game should not replace reality. This is indeed an issue—at the end of the film, as the terrorists strike, one of the shocked bystanders asks, "We're still in the game...right?"

Most science fiction written about the future of computer games seem to be cautionary tales at first, but this is probably too cynical an approach. The main characters must be in danger or must have some quest to fulfill; otherwise, the story amounts to somebody entering the game, looking around, and leaving. Ellison once stated that *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* was actually an upbeat, humanistic tale, about how nothing can truly destroy the human spirit.

Commonalties can be found in the various books surveyed here. In all of them, the game has evolved beyond something unrealistic; indeed, it is ultra-realistic. In his book, Anthony made a point about how sexuality could be included in a future game with a piece of equipment that attaches directly to the hips.

Books published more recently feature the Internet as a major element. *Killobyte* included what could be considered an MMORPG, but it had no linkage over the Internet, which, had only just been made available to the general public. Instead, the implication is that the game dials directly into the game server, the same system used by pre-*Ultima Online* MMORPGs. *Caverns of Socrates* didn't make much mention of the Internet either, but at the same time, it was about the testing of a prototype, with an implication that eventually it would be a persistent world. The final entries, *Wyrm* and *Otherland*, both have the Internet as one of the building blocks of the game; the game can't exist without it.

On the big screen, the focus tends to be different, looking closely at the nature of reality rather than the implications of the game itself. In both *The Thirteenth Floor* and *The Matrix*, sentient human beings exist within a persistent world without realizing it. In *Harsh Realm* and *eXistenZ*, the main characters knew they were in a game, and the question became how real the game actually was.

In all cases, when something goes wrong, the players end up trapped inside the game or persistent world, with their real lives in jeopardy. Usually, this happens through some sort of neural interface, to such a frequency that it is almost entirely a plot device.

If science fiction writers and filmmakers agree on anything, it is that two things will happen with the persistent world/computer game. The first is that it will become based in virtual reality, and the second is that it will be a multiplayer game. The question now lies as to how accurate this will be.

CURRENT TRENDS

Most progress is made in baby steps, regardless of the technology. One refinement leads to another, which inspires somebody else in a different field, and so on. The great breakthroughs that scientists are depicted as seeking in films are often quite rare. As Jeff Goldblum's character observed in *Jurassic Park*, "You took what other people had done, and built on it."

Perhaps the key to predicting the future is looking at where the baby steps will take us. At this point in time, four major trends

in computer gaming will dictate the course of the future: graphical trends, customizability options, access to the Internet, and the crossing of genres.

Graphical Trends

The first is graphical. The first computer graphics were primitive in comparison to what is available now, so much so that these old-timers look downright embarrassing. At the time, though, a spacecraft flying away from its mother ship in *Space Quest* was an amazing sight.

It seems that every six months a new type of graphics chip becomes available. Modern games feature three-dimensional effects, along with photorealistic backgrounds. The multiplayer mode of *Return to Castle Wolfenstien* looked as though it was right out of *Saving Private Ryan*, with bombed-out buildings so atmospheric you could practically smell the dust.

Photorealism seems to be one of the main goals of the computer game industry today—more specifically, photorealism of the human form.

Most 3D computer graphics are created using polygons. These shapes can be smoothed out, and the higher the resolution, the higher the number of polygons that can be used for a single object.

Some objects are easier to render than others; a desk and a chair, for example, is quite easy to produce with photographic accuracy. The human form, however, is another story. Instead of being easy to render, human

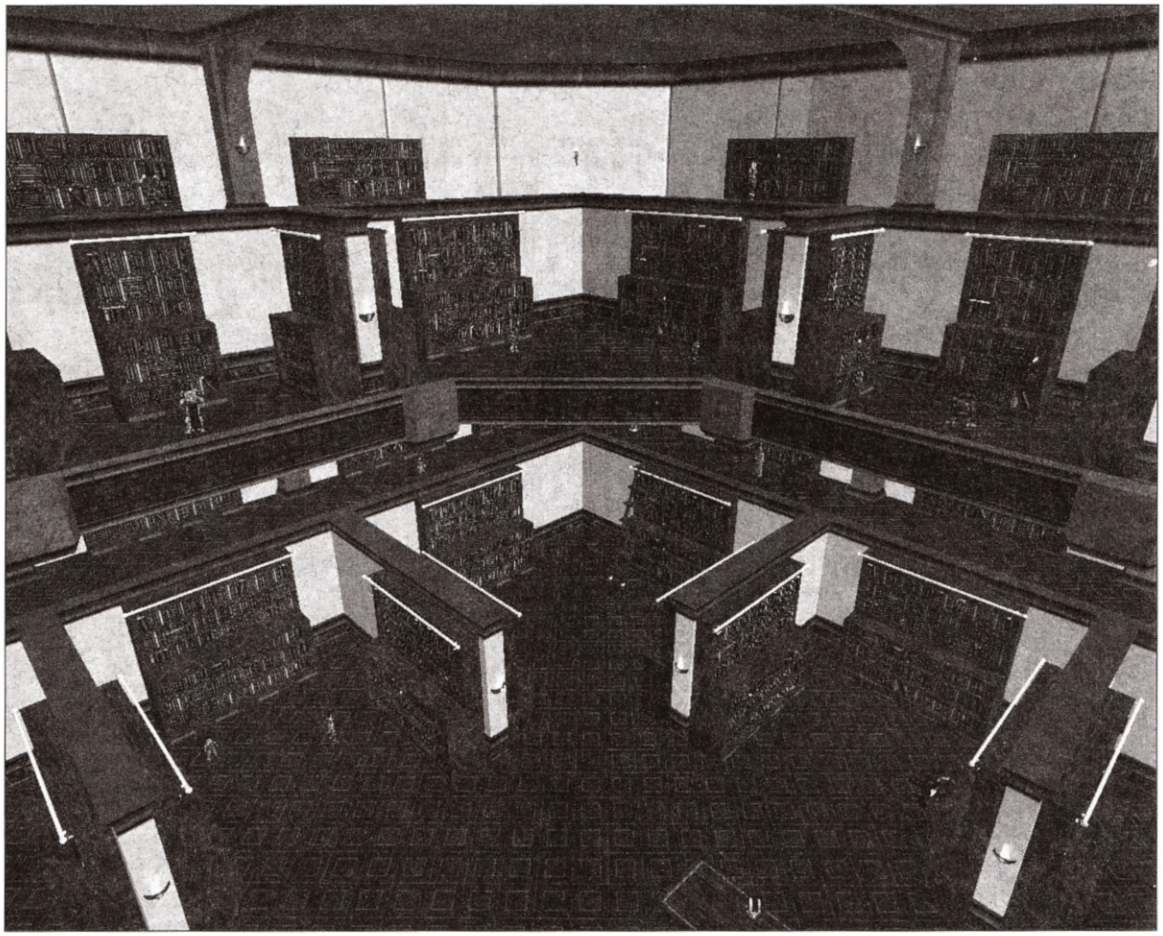
The *EverQuest II* engine

beings are as far from geometric as it gets. A single piece of skin contains thousands of imperfections, and a computer's attempt to render it often looks artificial. Even the massive effort by the animation team of *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* created a landscape that looked as real as it could get, creatures that would have been impressive in any Hollywood motion picture, and human beings that didn't look quite right.

This doesn't stop computer game companies from trying to render a realistic human being, however. To display the face textures of *The Planes of Power* properly, a computer needs at least 512 MB of memory. And even then they still aren't quite right. However, as time goes on and technology advances, the ultra-realism that the computer games seek will become possible.

Customizability Options

The second trend is customizability, which is not actually anything new. As early as the *Gold Box Dungeons & Dragons* games, one could determine exactly what their character looked like within certain limits. Later games, such as *Civilization II* and *DOOM*, allowed users to make new games, known as "mods," using the existing engine. Until recently, players creating new mods was a relatively rare phenomenon.



The *Planes of Power* engine

In the last five years, however, the idea of customizability has taken root dramatically. Especially in role-playing games, the ability to make modifications to the game has become almost a standard feature. *Neverwinter Nights*, released in 2002 by Bioware and Atari, was as much a role-playing engine as it was a game—it even came with the tools players could use to modify the game and create brand new adventures using that engine.

Customizability is also a staple of persistent worlds. One of the precepts of games such as *EverQuest* is that you can be whoever you want to be. It would be silly to create such a world and then restrict what players choose as their avatars. Although racial character restrictions do exist (for example, Elves must have pointed ears), any player in the *EverQuest* game can dictate the appearance of his or her avatar. The only current limit is the technology—*EverQuest Online Adventures*, for example, has fewer choices for the appearance of each avatar, as the technological limitations for a Playstation are far more stringent than for a PC, where the sky is almost the limit.

Access to the Internet

The third trend is access to the Internet. Less than seven years ago, the Internet was something new for computer games. *Warcraft II*, for example, did not have online play as one of its multiplayer options (although it could be played on any local area network), and *Diablo* was revolutionary when it was released in 1996 because it could be played on an Internet-based public server. Now, as detailed earlier in this book, online play has become an absolute necessity. Indeed, when *Civilization III* shipped without a multiplayer option, many fans were absolutely aghast that they wouldn't be able to play online.

Today, two types of games use the Internet: games with a multiplayer option and games that are Internet based. So far, the Internet-based games are MMORPGs. This is logical enough; a network the size of the Internet lends itself naturally to games with hundreds, if not thousands, of players. Several types of games have been adapted to a persistent world format. *World War II Online* is a first-person simulation that allows players to play out World War II, with campaigns based on the real battles; occasionally, one side is victorious over the other, and the campaign is restarted.

Although the second type of game uses the Internet as a multiplayer option, the trend seems to be moving toward greater integration with online gaming. Back in 1998, *Baldur's Gate*, which is primarily a single-player game, shipped with a multiplayer mode that allowed one to join up with a party and play through the game. This seemed almost tacked on, however. Four years later, *Neverwinter Nights* went as far as to have a game master mode, allowing a player actually to control a campaign played over the Internet. When Blizzard re-released *Warcraft II* in 1999, it had Internet play built into it.

Competing Modular Games

***Dungeon Siege*, released in the same year by Microsoft, was also designed around the idea of mods. Where *Neverwinter Nights* was based around *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Dungeon Siege* was an action-based role-playing game in the same mode as *Diablo II*. *Dungeon Siege* was also made even easier for mod makers to access, so that it would have greater longevity and essentially serve as an engine for that type of game. Unfortunately, the development tools were not available until long after the game shipped, and *Neverwinter Nights* stole *Dungeon Siege's* thunder.**

The same was true a year later for *Diablo II*, which stored player characters on an online server for extra security.

It can almost be said that the two models of online play are beginning to merge. Combined with the Application Service Provider (ASP) model, where the application is held on a server that the user accesses over a network, which has been gaining more and more acceptance (Microsoft's .Net strategy is in many ways a version of this model), computing itself seems to be moving toward an Internet-based model. In the next few years, the line between an Internet-based game and a game with a multiplayer mode may be very blurred indeed.

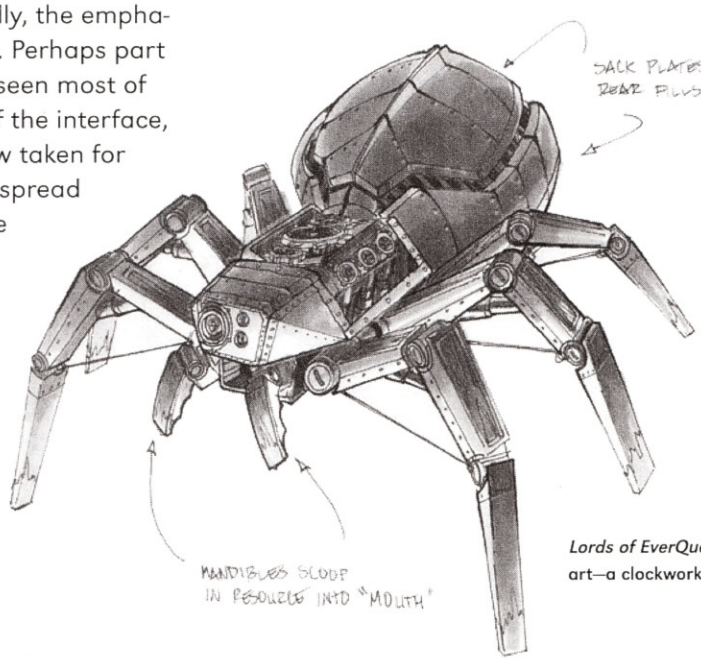
One of the results of these three trends is a re-emphasis on storytelling. In the beginning, computer games had to rely on storytelling because they lacked fancy graphics. Then the proverbial pendulum swung the other way. In the mid-1990s, with the success of *DOOM* and *DOOM II*, graphics became far more important than story in many games, as the market was flooded with first-person shooters and real-time strategy games.

In the here and now, even though the technology is advancing rapidly, the emphasis on storytelling is returning. Perhaps part of this is that the market has seen most of the variations on new tricks of the interface, or that great graphics are now taken for granted, even expected. Widespread Internet access has also made mass storytelling possible, where a single story can be experienced and influenced by several players at once.

The advance in graphics technology has dramatically increased the storytelling power of the computer game. The modern computer game is often an odd combination of a film, a book, and a board game. It has cinematics, text to read, and an interactive element. It transforms the audience from an observer into a participant. With photorealistic graphics, it has become possible to make a game immediately compelling, to make the willing suspension of disbelief easier to create, and to allow the designers to concentrate on a stronger story.

Crossing Genres

The fourth trend is a crossing of genres. Back in 2002, Blizzard announced that it would be moving its real-time strategy game world of Azeroth into the MMORPG genre in a game titled *World of Warcraft*. Sony has taken similar steps, but in the other direction—on April 16, 2003, Sony announced that in addition to a sequel to *EverQuest*, it would also be releasing a real-time strategy game titled *Lords of EverQuest*, which had begun development during the beginning of 2002 as a turn-based game with a projected two-year development cycle. Unlike most of the *EverQuest* titles, *Lords of EverQuest* was produced by Sony, but the development was outsourced to Rapid Eye Entertainment. This game would be set at the beginning of



Lords of EverQuest concept art—a clockwork spider

Norrath's history, where players would compete to find an ancient artifact of great power while leading armies to conquer the world. While many of the features of *Lords of EverQuest* would be familiar to a seasoned real-time strategy (RTS) player, the game focuses on role-playing aspects, such as being able to equip all troops with magical weapons found during the course of the game.

"It's taking what people love—*EverQuest*—and mixing it with a game that I would say is the current reigning champ—*Warcraft III*—and adding our own unique twists and flavor to it," John Smedley said.

Lords of EverQuest **concept art—a dark elf**

Lords of EverQuest—a battle in progress

"It's a way of saying, 'look, we can do awesome new things with this franchise...it doesn't all have to be RPGs.' It's really the desire here for us to take what we love and put it into something else that we love. Also, the strategy genre has around 32 percent of the PC market—we're not going to sit idly by and let that languish."

At first this seems like an odd move for Sony, especially considering that *EverQuest*'s strength has always been in the role-playing genre. However, the MMORPG does not allow one to lead armies (a staple of real-time strategy), and *Lords of EverQuest* will be able to add a new dimension to the *EverQuest* phenomenon. The single-player mode opens up the *EverQuest* world to those who would feel lost in an MMORPG. Additionally, the more limited multiplayer will allow gamers better control over who they play with.

As James Parker, a former comic book artist and now the producer of *Lords of EverQuest* noted, the biggest problem with developing the game wasn't any programming challenge, but instead a public outcry. "People looked at us and said, 'You can't do that—how dare you do something other than an RPG?'"

The eventual intention of *Lords of EverQuest* is that it will become a massively multiplayer game in its own right, with events that players cause through leading their armies impacting the other *EverQuest* games. This attention to continuity adds an extra dimension to the entire phenomenon, increasing the degree to which Norrath is a living, breathing world.

It is an experiment, and like any such experiment, it is gambling that the world of Norrath will endure outside of its original game genre. This seems to be a good gamble—the success of the *EverQuest* role-playing game, the conversion of the MMORPG onto the console, and even the mobile phone games show that *EverQuest* is far more than a passing fad. It has true staying power, both as a creative work and as a phenomenon.

THE COMPUTER GAME IN A DECADE

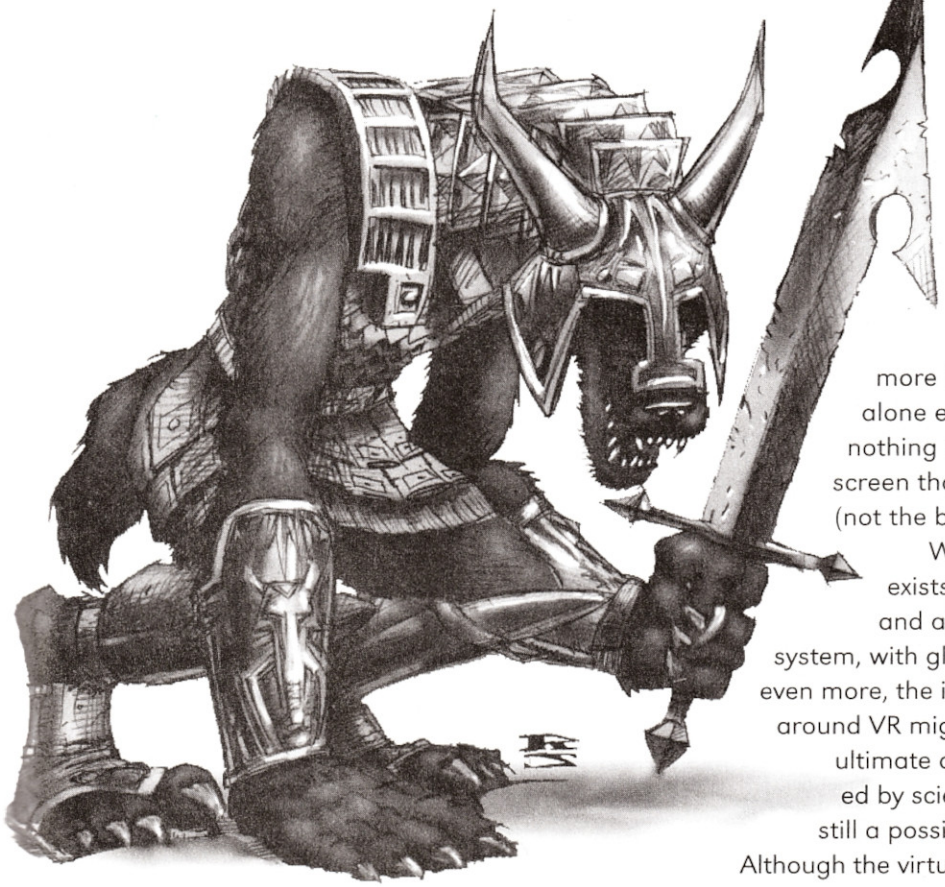
Perhaps the greatest irony of the last ten years is that virtual reality, much heralded by science fiction authors, actually failed when it was attempted with computer games. In the late 1990s, virtual reality headsets were sold to the public, and several games, such as LucasArt's *Dark Forces*, were adapted to use the new technology.

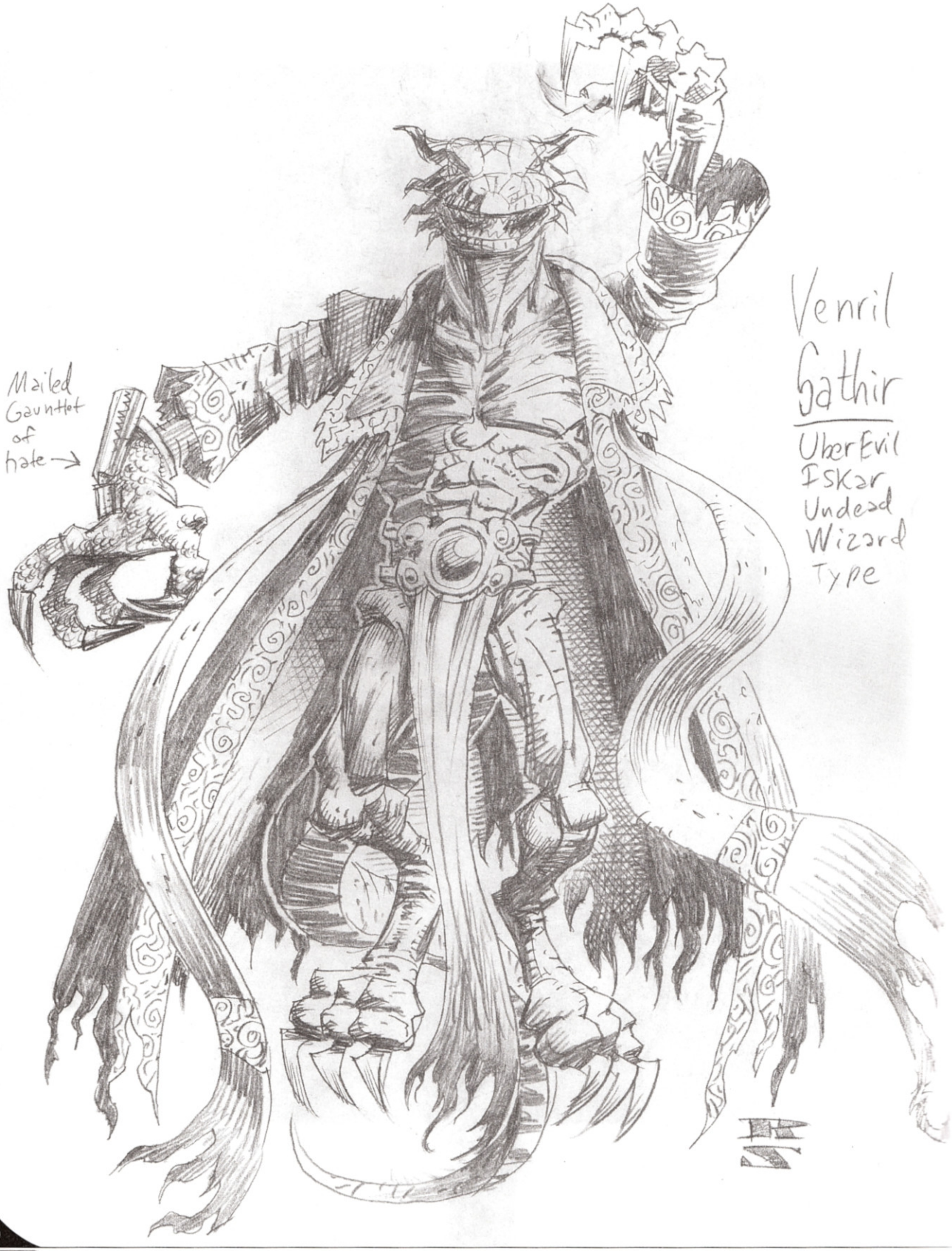
The results were singularly less than spectacular. The headsets worked by displaying the screen in front of a player's eyes without anything to frame it, and motions of the head affected the viewpoint on the screen. (For example, tilting your head up would make the screen viewpoint stare at the ceiling.) However, it was still a primitive technology; the resolution was limited, and the headsets had a tendency to cause nausea if you played for more than 20 minutes. It was hardly the game revolution predicted by Anthony and Williams.

However, the question remains of whether the experiment failed because the public didn't want virtual reality or because the technology was incomplete. In the science fiction works surveyed earlier, the virtual reality systems not only had headsets, but there was equipment to cover the movement of hands and feet as well. In reality, it is more likely that the headsets alone ended up presenting nothing more than a smaller screen that could induce nausea (not the best of developments).

When the technology exists to create a complete and affordable virtual reality system, with gloves, boots, and possibly even more, the idea of a game based around VR might see a resurgence. The ultimate computer games presented by science fiction authors are still a possible reality.

Although the virtual reality trend is missing




Mailed Gauntlet of hate →
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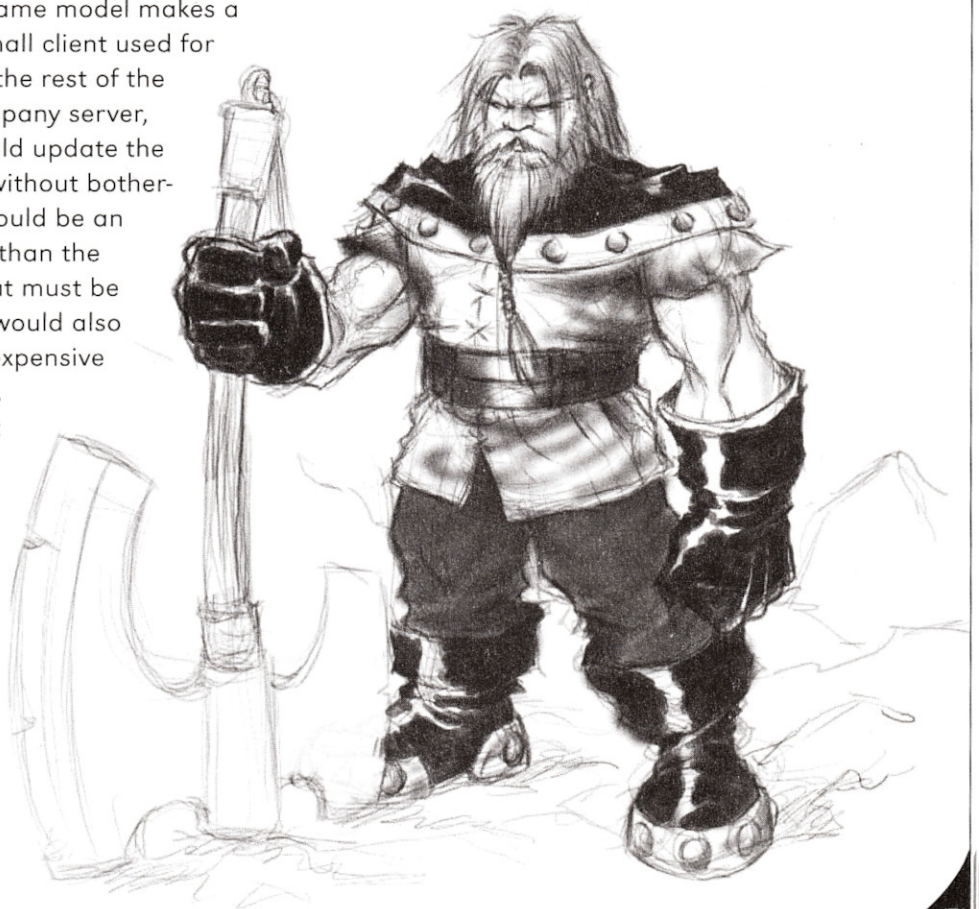
from the modern game market, lost in a failed experiment, other trends discussed so far will lead to a certain type of game in the future. Indeed, with some certainty, we can predict what it will be, as in all cases, the seeds of the future already exist in the present.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the future game will be complete integration with the Internet. This is already happening to a certain degree. Massively multiplayer games such as *EverQuest* have made the leap, but the form that they have taken is one to which other games are leading. For example, *FreeCiv*, a freeware version of *Civilization*, already uses a client-server model, where even a single-player game is started on a server and played using a client, and players can use their clients to join a multiplayer game anywhere in the world.

The server-based game model makes a lot of sense. With a small client used for computer games and the rest of the game stored on a company server, the game creators could update the game at their leisure without bothering the end users; it would be an invisible patch, rather than the significant patches that must be downloaded today. It would also make the games less expensive and more streamlined, as the users would not have to buy a complete unit, but only a small part.

The great challenge with this model of computer game is twofold: to create a client that does not need patching, and to have a server that is completely secure and will be able to operate constantly. In the here and now, neither exist; even *EverQuest* still issues client patches, as does *EverQuest II*. As for complete security, that will be extremely difficult; crackers on the Internet take pride in being able to break open systems, and as soon as a new game comes out, they see it as nothing more than a challenge (a philosophy that ruined the playing experience for thousands of legitimate *Diablo II* players).

The model can be considered, in some ways, a mixed blessing. It is nice to have a complete game on your computer system, which you can come back to years after you bought it (a common thing for *Civilization* fans). At the same time, with an Internet client-server model for a game, the moment a company stops supporting its game, the



game would cease to function; it would be playable only so long as a server exists for it. This problem is easily solved, however—all a company has to do is release the server for sale alongside the client. This is close to the current model of release, but it's not quite there. Most buyers would not need the full game and would be happy owning the clients alone.

The next refinement would be a universal game client. Again, to a degree, this already exists—any JAVA game can be played in a JAVA-enabled Web browser, regardless of the content of the game. To have a single client for all games would still require work, as the client would have to be able to cover an infinite number of possibilities. Once a universal client exists, however, it is quite possible that it would replace what remains of the non-server–based game, along with most of the unique client games.

A natural extension to this development would be a redesigning of role-playing games in general. The massively multiplayer server-based game, refined throughout the last two decades (and even earlier with the MUDs), is an ideal game model for role playing. By definition, it can handle thousands of players at once, and the actions the players may take in *EverQuest* or *EverQuest II* are essentially the same as in any other role-playing game, from *Diablo* to *Neverwinter Nights*.

Multiplayer gameplay has already taken priority in many role-playing games. Both *Diablo* and *Diablo II* were designed around it, as was *Dungeon Siege* and *Neverwinter Nights*. In *Diablo II* the priority of multiplayer gameplay is most noticeable—the single player mode is identical to the multiplayer version of the game. In retrospect, this makes far more sense than creating two separate types of game; creating a multiplayer game and having a single-player option is far more efficient and easier on the programmers.

If you take into account all of these factors, it isn't too hard to imagine the computer game of 2013 or 2018. It wouldn't be so much a game as it would be a client, or perhaps a plug-in to a pre-existing universal client. The main game would be stored on the server, a massively multiplayer game

model with a single-player mode, and possibly a limited multiplayer mode for those who don't want the entire MMORPG experience. For smaller games, it might not be a massively multiplayer model; it might be a smaller multiplayer game, instead, with a model resembling a number of chat rooms, where people can form adventuring parties and wander off into the game world created just for them (which, again, already exists to a degree with *Neverwinter Nights*).

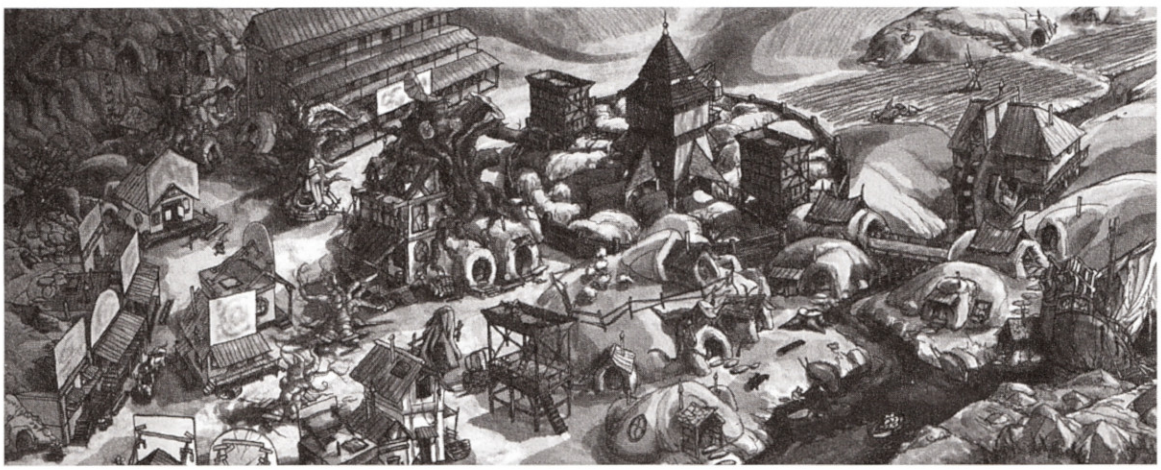
In another 10 years, or perhaps sooner, virtual reality may come into its own. Even though it failed the first time it was introduced to the market, this does not mean the technology is dead; on the contrary, the time may finally be right for it. An ideal VR system

is a much better way of playing games than the conventional monitor, mouse, keyboard, and joystick. Using a good virtual reality system to simulate sitting in a tank during a battle is as close as you can get to the real thing—certainly much closer than staring at a representation, no matter how realistic, on a computer screen. The ultimate game, the completely realistic simulation dependant on VR gear, is the logical next step. It would be surprising if it happened more than 20 years in the present.

How far this technology will spread is difficult to predict. Some developers are already working on a new interface for the Internet, based on the first-person shooter. A movement to VR gear, once the time is right and the technology is ready, would be a natural step. Perhaps the VR Internet of Williams's *Otherland* is not as far away from us as it first appears.

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, it is easy to predict the future; being accurate is the challenge. In 1970, the idea that almost every household would have a computer was laughable. Now, however, it is a reality. When read in the here and now, Ellison's 1967 story about the survivors of the human race trapped in the belly of AM appears to be something right out of virtual reality, even though Ellison himself has said that he had no such idea in his mind when he wrote it.

Now, more than ever, the future seems to be right in front of us. All the ideas just described for the future computer game already exist to some degree or another. How difficult would it be to create a single-player version of *EverQuest* on the server? The client-server model already exists in *FreeCiv* and to a lesser degree in *Battlefield 1942*. And the virtual reality technology has existed for years; it just isn't ready for the computer game yet. It is only a matter of time before it is.



AFTERWORD

THE WOMAN CALLED MARTINE LAUGHED. "I AM CERTAIN THIS NILES IS A FINE PERSON—BUT NO. YOU HAVE THE MOST WONDERFUL FRIENDS IMAGINABLE, FRIENDS WHO HAVE SUFFERED AT YOUR SIDE AND WHO HAVE TRIUMPHED AGAINST ALL ODDS, IN LARGE PART BECAUSE OF YOUR HEROISM."

"THEN WHY CAN'T I REMEMBER THEM?"

"BECAUSE, PAUL — DEAR, BRAVE PAUL — YOU HAVEN'T MET THEM YET. BUT YOU WILL."

—TAD WILLIAMS,
OTHERLAND: SEA OF SILVER LIGHT

THE BIG PICTURE

Every computer game, no matter what its genre, encapsulates the entire history that has gone before it. In each game you can find technological advances, links to what has gone before, and the seeds of the future.

The first computer games were curiosities, little more than programming exercises. When *Spacewar!* was played on university campuses during the 1960s, the game was almost below notice—certainly only the sum of its parts, if not less.

As the technology became better and less expensive, more became possible. Games began to tell stories and even used graphics, although in comparison to what is available today they were the equivalent of cave paintings. They were still little more than a curiosity—nothing more than a juvenile cousin of the arcade game, or so most people thought.

Between their beginnings and now, computer games have become far more than the sum of their parts. They have become a true medium of communication and storytelling

power. They have inspired us, forged communities, and even created storms of controversy. They are now an art form in and of themselves, worthy of all the respect given to a fine novel or Academy Award–worthy film.

It is tempting to view *EverQuest* and *EverQuest II* as an end; it is sometimes difficult to comprehend where the technology could still go. The world of *EverQuest* is a persistent world filled with dedicated players who bring the entire realm to life. Inside the game are lasting communities, conventions, and infinite possibilities to explore.

But *EverQuest* is not an end. Neither is *EverQuest II*—or an *EverQuest III*, should there be one. It is a stepping stone on the greater journey of the art form.

Whether we choose to admit it or not, the nature of the computer game is changing before our eyes. Massively multiplayer games, such as *EverQuest* and *EverQuest II*, are stages in the evolution of an entire medium. It is progress, advances that will make it easier and easier for games to finish the transformation from the primitive toy of the early 1960s to the ultimate achievement of multimedia entertainment. Already, most things that can be imagined can be put on the computer screen—if designers sometimes seem hesitant to make full use of this power, it is not so much a lack of imagination as it is like the trepidation of a newborn discovering the expanse of the world.

I deliberately use the term *evolution* to describe this process. The computer game is developing in an organic process, constantly changing to meet new technology and the changes in our culture itself. There is no final step, not until the human imagination itself ceases to be.

It's absolutely breathtaking, isn't it?

APPENDIX

EVERQUEST COMMUNITY SITES

WEB SITES

With a community of more than 430,000, many *EverQuest* Web sites exist, some of which have already been mentioned in this book. Here is a listing of some of the biggest and best, if you ever want to find them on the Internet, along with a partial list of features.

Some of the following sites are detailed in this book in Chapter 6:

Allakhazam's Magical Realm
(http://everquest.allakhazam.com)
Easily the largest *EverQuest* information site out there, with information on every aspect of the game and forums for discussion.

EverQuest Stratics
(http://eq.stratics.com) An information and community site, with polls, statistics, forums, and a video from Planes of Power.

EverLore
(http://www.everlore.com)
A large community site, with news, forums, polls, and game information.

EverQuest Casters Realm
(http://eq.castersrealm.com)
A large information site with an optional paid membership plan, with editorials, strategy guides, and zone information.

EverQuest Vault
(http://eqvault.ign.com) Another large community site, with news, forums, art, fiction, and humor.

PlanetEQ
(http://www.planeteq.com)
One of the largest *EverQuest* fan sites, with news, quizzes, forums, game information, and just about anything up to and including the kitchen sink.

EQMaps
(http://www.eqmaps.com)
An information site for the *EverQuest* world, with maps and item statistics.

EQ Atlas
(http://www.eqatlas.com)
An atlas of the *EverQuest* world.

EQDiva
(http://www.eqdiva.com)
A site dedicated to the bards of *EverQuest*, with news, game information, and forums.

EVERQUEST GUILDS

I've detailed several guilds in the book, which are only the barest tip of the iceberg. Here's a selection of other guilds from the Internet, along with a brief description. This is not a complete selection, or even a representative one, but it does show some of the wonderful variety that is out there.

The Noble Order of Excalibur
(http://www.orderexcal.com/)
A guild patterned after the Arthurian legends, with an emphasis on chivalry and justice.

The Clan MacLear
(http://www.clanmaclear.com/)
A role-playing guild based in Halas, with a strong connection to the Scottish clans. This guild also has members playing in *Dark Age of Camelot* and *Star Wars: Galaxies.*

The Kult of Steel
(http://members.tripod.com/kultofsteel/frames.htm) A good-aligned guild that seems to be channeling *Conan the Barbarian,* although it is open to any character class. The emphasis is on strength and honor.

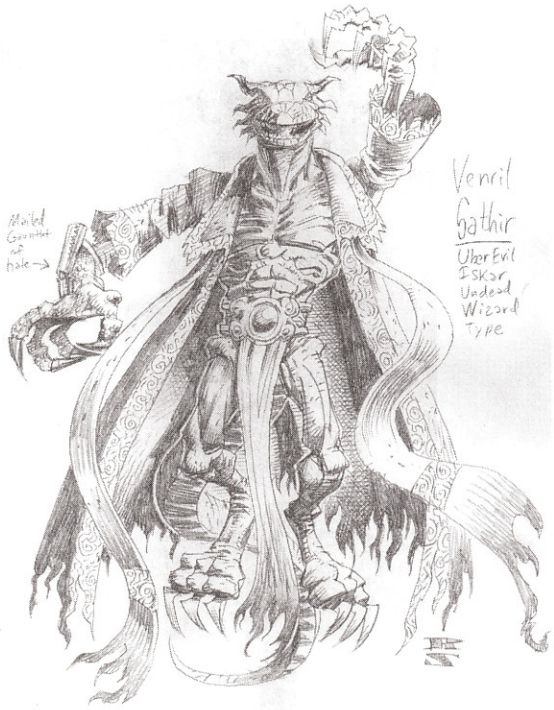
The Mercenaries of Darkness
(http://www.modvz.com/) An evil guild that is open only to the dark races who hunt down and destroy their enemies on Vallon Zek.

Mystical Alliances
(http://mystical_alliances.tripod.com/) A good-aligned guild on Vallon Zek centered on raiding and questing. The members won't initiate attacks against other players, but they will fight back if they are assaulted.

The Sword of Fate
(http://home.carolina.rr.com/mele/SwordOfFate/) A guild on the Prexus server that appears to be oriented around questing. This guild is open to all character races and classes.

The Eve of Prophecy
(http://eveofprophecy.tripod.com/)
A good-aligned guild on the Saryrn server focused on honor and good conduct.

Tragic Heroes
(http://www.tragicheroes.org/)
A guild on Saryrn centered on raiding and helping others. Members are of all races and classes.



Travelers of Norrath
(http://www.tonsaryrn.com/) A raiding guild on Saryrn with the mission of killing every mob in the game.

Whispering Spirits
(http://64.70.191.167/whisperingspirits/) A guild on Kane Bayle that calls itself "the finest hunting guild on the Kane Bayle server." The guild character has a strong emphasis on honor.

Bloodhorde
(http://www.bloodhorde.com/) An evil guild on the Terris Thule server concentrating on role playing. It has a rather colorful motto: "You will know us by the Trail of the DEAD...."

Sisters Seraphim
(http://www.sistersseraphim.com/) A social raiding guild for women on Terris Thule. It goes on mid- to high-level raids about once every two weeks, but it mainly exists so that its members can get support from one another.

Short Norrathians' Union
(http://home.earthlink.net/~cjedda/snu/) A social RPG guild for the shorter races of Norrath (Gnomes, Dwarves, and so on) on the Bristlebane server. This guild is aligned with the forces of good, but it will allow Dark Elves in, so long as they have forsaken their evil ways.

The United Kingdoms of Bristlebane
(http://www.united-kingdoms.org.uk/home.aspx) A raiding guild based in Great Britain. Their list of kills is quite impressive, including more than one god.

The Order of Revelry
(http://order_of_revelry.tripod.com/) One of the odder guilds out there. This is a guild dedicated to socializing, fun, and games—on the Tallon Zek player vs. player server. It's for Elves only, and their site says that if you see somebody suddenly fall out of the treetops around Kelethin, it's probably one of them.

Mithril Web
(http://www.mithrilweb.com/eq/)
A social guild located on the Lanys T'Vyl server. This one won't accept anybody as a member until they've gotten to know the person behind the keyboard. While they will go on raids, their main priority is having a good time while surrounded by friends.

Dark Reign
(http://www.geocities. com/darkreign_eq/main.html)
A very exclusive guild on Lanys T'Vyl. The guild is based on the concept of honor, and it chooses its members carefully. Once somebody is in, he or she may not join another guild, unless he or she first leaves Dark Reign.

Clan X
(http://www.eqclanx.com/Default2.htm) A highly structured guild on the Rathe server. They do a lot of raiding, but at the same time, their mandate is to have fun as a group.

Ascending Dawn
(http://www.ascendingdawn.com/) A very competitive guild on Rallos Zek. They're currently raiding their way through the planes, and as of the end of July 2003, they were working on being the first guild in the first player vs. player server to enter the Plane of Time (the end-game level of *The Planes of Power*).

Lush
(http://www.eqlush.net/)
A social guild on the test server. The best way to become a member is to get to know the guild, and then they might vote you in. All races and classes are welcome.

Dark Reformation
(http://www.geocities.com/dreformation/shadow.htm) An evil-aligned guild on the Luclin server. Only evil character races and classes are allowed. The guild's main focus is to ensure that its members have fun in the game.

Alliance of the Planes
(http://www.geocities.com/allianceoftheplanes/) A social guild on the Luclin server. While this guild does raid on occasion, the main focus is having fun and being social. If you want to concentrate on getting up to high levels and raiding all the time, this is the wrong guild for you.

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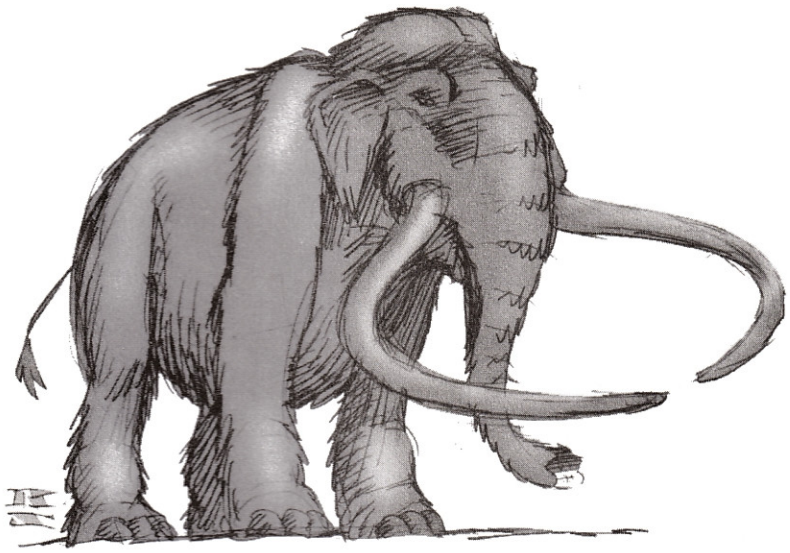

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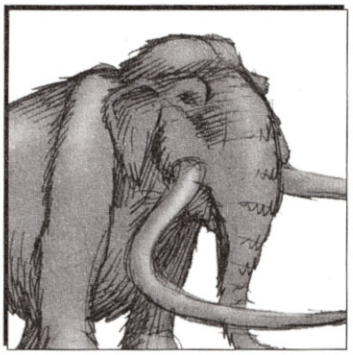

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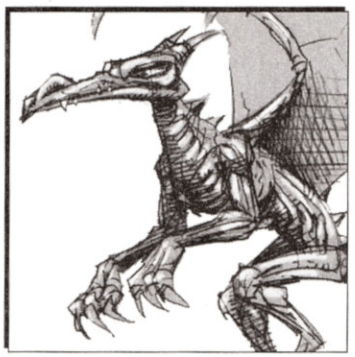

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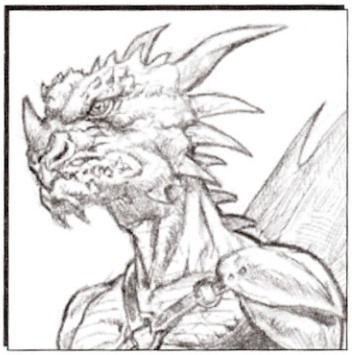

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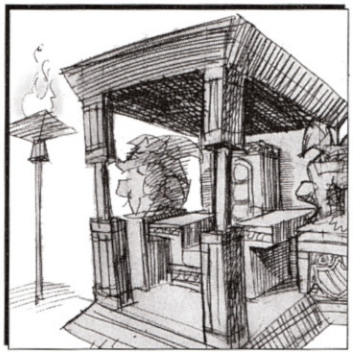

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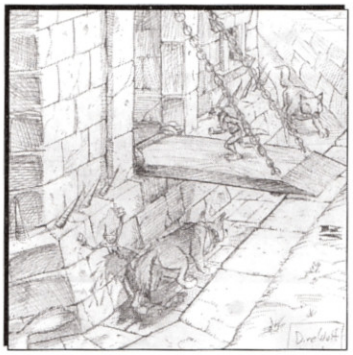

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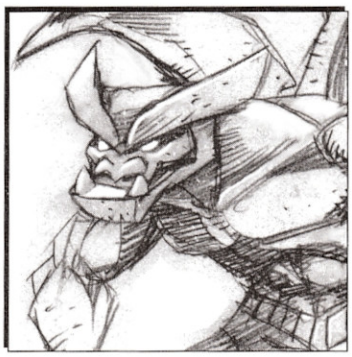

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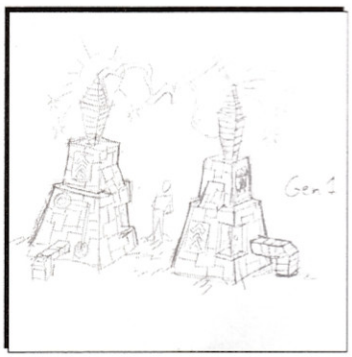

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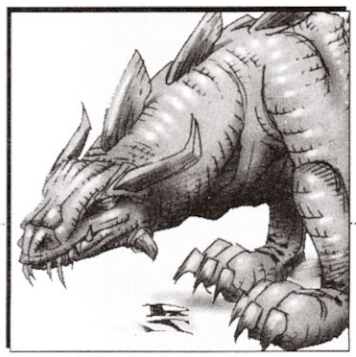

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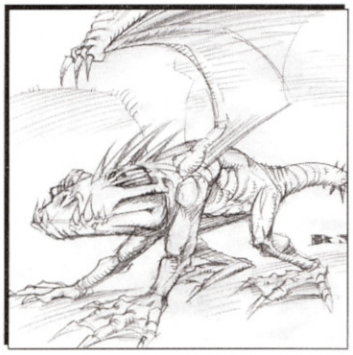

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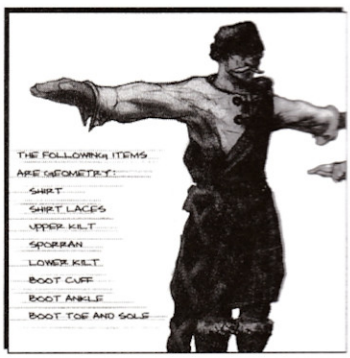

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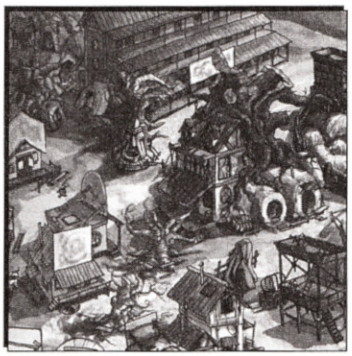

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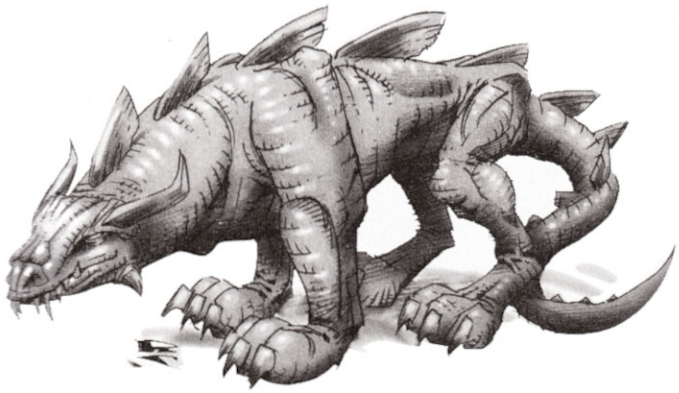

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And the multitude of people I've missed.
Thank you all.

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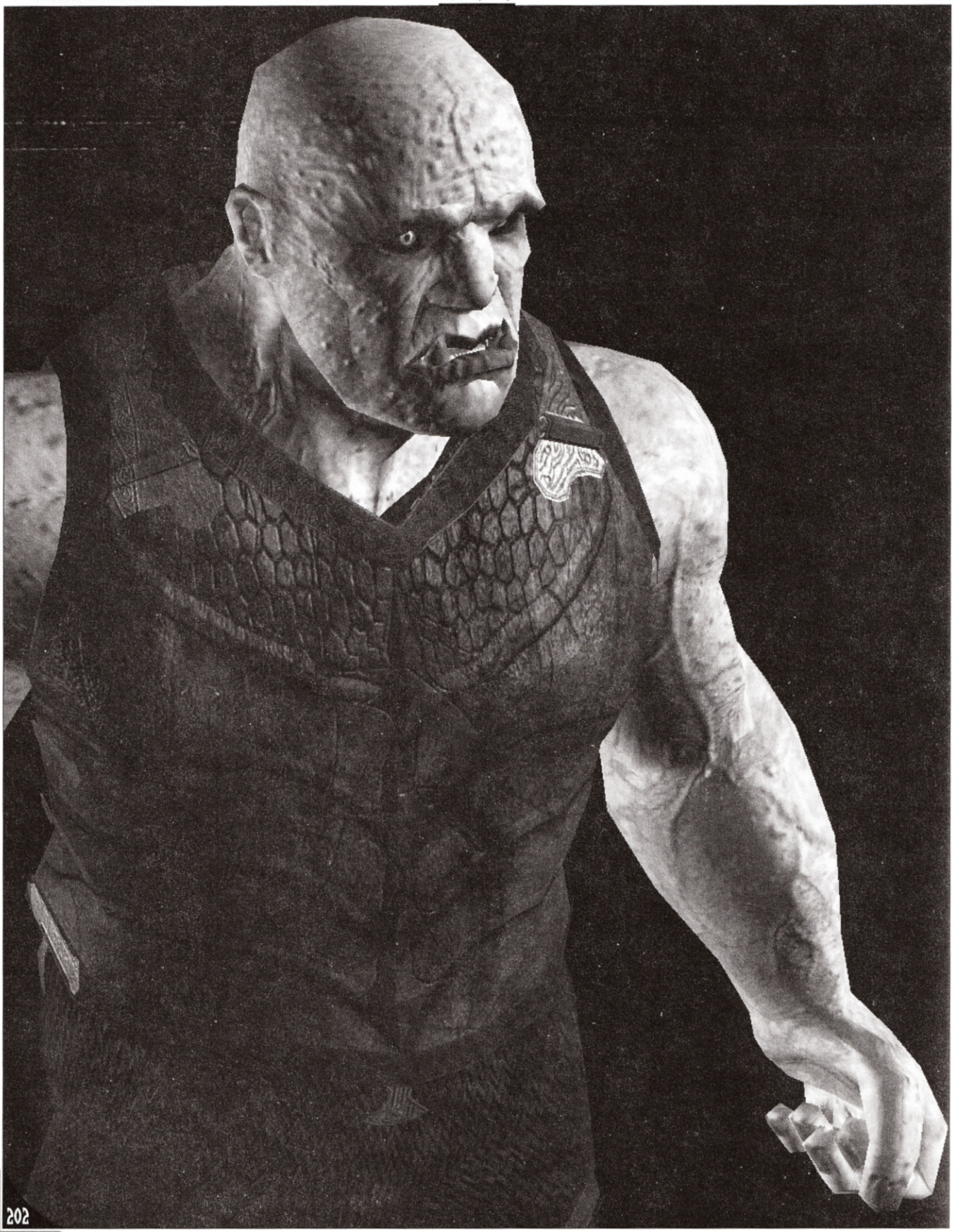

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Robert B. Marks is a writer, editor, and EverQuest enthusiast who has been involved with computer games for his entire adult life (and most of his childhood). He is author of the best-selling ebook *Diablo: Demonsbane*, and writes *Garwulf's Corner*, a gaming column.

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